

PREACHING ON DEATH:
ITS PROCEDURES AND POSSIBILITIES

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Doctor of Ministry

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REFLECTIONS

So you speak to me of sadness
And the coming of the winter
Fear that is within you now
That seems to never end
And the dreams that have escaped you
And a hope that you've forgotten

And you wonder where we're going
Where's the rhyme and where's the reason
And it's you cannot accept
It is here we must begin
To seek the wisdom of the children
And the graceful way of flowers in the wind

In their innocence and trusting
They will teach us to be free.

-- John Denver

There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and
the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning.

-- Thornton Wilder

And death shall have no dominion.
Dead men naked they shall all be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean
and the clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea
they shall rise again,
Though lovers be lost love shall not,
And death shall have no dominion.

-- Dylan Thomas

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I dedicate this paper to Diane, my wife and companion, and to Jennifer and Justin, our children, for the love and freedom they have given me to explore ideas and to grow; to the members of First Christian Church of Reseda, and the People of God everywhere for giving me the gift of ministering in Christ's name; and in memory of my Grandparents whose living and dying taught me a great deal about Life.

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ABSTRACT

This project relates the procedures and findings of exegesis, hermeneutic, theological reflection to the task of preaching on death. The need for such an undertaking together with the essential features which constitute the preaching orientation in modern society is set out in the first chapter. The second chapter develops the exegetical tools for a study of passages relating to death: exegetical procedure, a study of rhetoric and its implications for New Testament study, a study of the positions of five Early Fathers in relation to death, and studies of significant words in Greek. The third chapter develops models for interpreting a passage based on Bultmann, the New Hermeneutic, Paul Van Buren and Erich Auerbach. The fourth chapter develops a theological frame of reference for integrating the insights of scripture. Chapter five demonstrates how all these work together on a text, namely I Corinthians 15.35-58.

Methodologically, the project maintains that the modern preacher has at his disposal and should make use of several models for interpreting the Christian hope in the face of death. In terms of content, theologically, the project criticizes both "liberal" and "conservative" approaches to the problem of death, and centers on the work of Ladislaus Boros and his concept of death as a moment for decision, as the most adequate frame of reference for preaching. Rather than urging that the preacher limit himself in the preaching task to only one theological approach or hermeneutical model, the project encourages a variegated pattern of preaching and the use of wide-ranging resources.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther was a busy preacher. When once he was prevailed upon to take some time to reflect on the nature of death and how a faithful Christian should respond to it, he wrote that we should "invite death into our presence while it is still at a distance", i.e., while we are still living, but that we should turn from death to life when it has finally come to meet us.¹ The advice would still seem to be fruitful. Except for the possibility that inviting death into our consciousness might be seen as a morbid preoccupation by some persons, the advice shares in the common sense that is typical of all efforts to "be prepared." The only question that Luther did not answer is one that is poignant for busy preachers today, and that is how best to invite death into our presence.

Death was, until just recently, a taboo subject in our society. Even though we are seeing a deluge of literature and media presentations on the subject currently, death is still a hard topic to broach in the local congregation. The reasons for this are many. For one thing, the topic is emotionally loaded. For another, the fact that we live in a pluralistic society means it is hard to find a single point from which to begin where everyone will be open to hearing what the preacher has to say. Finally, even when we have found a platform from which to speak

¹Martin Luther, "A Sermon on Preparing to Die," in his Works. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1969), XLII, 95-116.

the Christian understanding of death, we find that there is no single understanding that can be labelled Christian.

The complexities of the problem of preaching on death might be taken as ample warning that one should leave the area alone. But, of course this would not be possible. Nor would it be desirable. With the turn of events that is characteristic of our era as fast-paced and as immersed in the realities of life and death as it is, there is no viable way one could remain silent about death and be a responsible representative of the Christian faith. The times cry out for a word of clarity, reality and hope for this subject. It is no longer possible or desirable to let the Christian word about death be carried in pious and out-worn phrases, however venerable. And the taboo concerning speaking about death must be broken because it inevitably results in a distortion of the meaning of life. Luther also observed that the great dread that death holds for us results largely from the fact that we "forget God. . . and in the end are and remain disobedient to God." Preaching on death has the great benefit of reminding us of the basic situation in which we live, and points us to the way God has provided for our reconciliation with Him: namely, the way of the Cross.

In view, then, of the problems and the potential inherent in preaching on such a vast and important subject as death, a systematic study of its procedures and possibilities seems appropriate.

Aim

We propose in this project to study the resources for preaching on death from the Christian perspective, and to explore some possibilities for preaching contained in a New Testament text. The resources for preaching on death would include not only the scriptural and theological statements on death, and related issues, but the procedures for exegesis and models for communication developed by the study of language and hermeneutic. The possibilities for preaching would be elaborated from the application of these resources to a specific New Testament text.

Design

Chapter one will describe the aim and design of the project, as well as set the general orientation from which the preacher must begin to approach the problem of death.

Chapter two will treat the problems and techniques of exegesis as they apply in preaching and as they have specific relevance for preaching on death. Included in this chapter will be a description of specialized tools which will aid in the exegesis of texts relating to death, tools such as word studies, the development of the principles of rhetoric for understanding texts, and a brief account of the way the Early Fathers handled the problem of death in the period following the New Testament literature.

Chapter three will describe several hermeneutical theories and the ways in which they help provide models for interpreting and translating the Christian word about death to contemporary audiences.

Chapter four will examine three theological approaches to death with a view to providing a frame of reference for the integrating of the findings of the exegesis and hermeneutic.

Chapter five will demonstrate how these findings have relevance for a specific text from the New Testament and how, in turn, the text illuminates our understanding of death. We will also show how the text may be developed for preaching.

Limits

We will not attempt a history of the theological ideas concerning death and dying, though we will attempt to show how historical considerations may be useful in the preaching task.

We will not attempt to deal with counseling techniques in the presence of death. We are confident, however, that much that is relevant to the preacher here will also be relevant to the minister as counselor.

We will not attempt to articulate a theology of death as such though there is a great need for such an undertaking. We will outline three theological approaches to death and indicate the strengths and peculiar contributions of each, indicating also where our own affinities lie.

Finally, we will not attempt to delineate procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of preaching on death. This, too, is an area in

need of study, but one which falls outside the competency of the present writer.

We have understood our project to be a kind of laboratory. We have sought to bring together many different studies and concerns in order to see what might develop with respect to the preaching task as it deals with the reality and the problem of death.

The Preaching Orientation

In this section, we shall attempt to present three important elements that must be considered by the preacher before starting out to preach on death.

The first deals with the types of situations into which the minister is called to speak about death. The second has to do with the fact that the Church is a socializing agent, that is an institution which has been given the task of interpreting and preparing people for death. The third has to do with the essential dynamics of the human personality as disclosed by a recent reinterpretation of psychoanalysis.

Death and the Situation for Preaching. The modern preacher must speak to the problem of death in at least three distinct settings:

- (1) as pastor, he must speak to it in the context of immediate death;
- (2) as teacher and interpreter of the Christian faith, he must speak to it in the normal course of preaching about life concerns; (3) as prophet, he must speak to it as it relates to the broad social and ethical issues of our time.

The pastor, as shepherd, is concerned to share the joys and pains of his people as one who brings good news and healing resources

that are at the heart of the Christian faith. Grief is a poignantly painful experience and universally human. Normally, grief is associated with a past event, for example, the death of a friend or family member. As an essential part of a pastoral ministry, preaching in the presence of grief and preaching as part of grief work must be given careful attention. Yet, increasingly in modern society, the preacher is not limited to dealing with grief only from the pulpit of the funeral chapel, and only after death. Anticipatory grief work is also a reality where aged persons are members of the Church, where the families of seriously ill and terminal persons are members, or where terminally ill persons themselves are able to attend preaching services. Where the preacher is aware of the presence of such persons, his words must be regarded with care and with a renewed sense of their preciousness. Much is made these days of the notion of "word-event," or preaching as itself enabling a new reality--God's reality--to stand full and free in the midst of the community of faith. For the preacher who is aware of the needs of his people to work with their grief, past, present, or imminent, this can only serve to heighten his sense of urgency of speaking well and therapeutically about death.

The minister is also an educator, and as such seeks to prepare his congregation to meet the demands of daily living with the insights of the Christian tradition. Since death, too, is a part of daily life, the minister must not avoid the responsibility of preaching on the problems it presents. It is not always clear, however, how or even if this task should be undertaken. In a recent study, in which clergymen of many denominations in the Southern California area were questioned as

to how and how often they preached on the subject of death, it was found that a very small percentage felt their parishioners "were ready" for sermons on death and dying. The greatest number believed that death should be discussed only with individuals. Most reported feeling, themselves, uncomfortable preaching on death and, as a result, rarely spoke on the subject from the pulpit. We could observe that it would be a poor educator indeed who, because his students did not like to hear about a certain subject, or because it was not his specialty though clearly a part of his field of responsibility, avoided the subject altogether. But what is compelling in regard to the necessity of preaching on death is that it is a crucial area of life which most people are ready, even yearning to have discussed. We could point here for evidence to the overwhelming number of books--many of them written for popular audiences--on the subject of death. We could point to Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' finding that dying persons were themselves open to talking about death. It is this writer's experience that Church people are quite receptive to preaching on death as well as to other forms educating and equipping them to deal with it. But whether the evidence is documentary or personal, whether it has to do with the openness or shyness of people to hear, the indisputable fact for the Christian minister is that death is a central subject in the Christian faith and that, on that account alone, in order to be faithful to his calling as a minister he must give attention in his preaching to the word faith speaks about death.

Finally, there is a prophetic calling in the preaching ministry, a calling to be relevant to the issues that most typify or engulf our

times. Here it is less obvious where death enters as a subject for preaching for usually death stands as a backdrop which scarcely emerges as a center of attention as these issues play out their parts. Yet, careful attention to the nature of such issues as war, the ecology, the trends and implications of technology, and the readily transparent matters of abortion and euthanasia/death-with-dignity show how, in fact, death is an ever-present part of human existence. Perhaps it is the case that we have had so little power over our nation's conduct of foreign policy--e.g., Vietnam--because we have been a people who have denied death historically. Perhaps the same can be said for our slowness in acting on the persons and processes that threaten our environment, or our inability to grasp what it means when the demands of the technological engineering of our society renders death a matter of statistical concern only, or the confusion of our thinking over when life begins and when it ends. We are not here suggesting that a sudden discussion of death, or a renewed interest in preaching on it will make these problems disappear. But it seems incontestable that appropriating a deeper understanding of death and what the Christian faith has to say about it would help clarify what is of value in some of these other issues, would at least help us deal with the obvious life and death questions inherent in them with a little more sensitivity. The prophet calls to the mind of God's people what it is they have forgotten, or avoided. That seems to be rationale enough for the preacher today giving attention to how he should announce "the word of the Lord" on the subject, a subject which insinuates itself into all other subjects.

The question arises, "When should one preach on death?"

We have already indicated that the need for preaching on death may present itself in the form of persons who must deal with past or imminent grief. In this case, the preacher would be given an indication of an appropriate time for preaching on death through his pastoral sensitivity. We also indicated above that death is a central concern of the Christian faith. This would suggest that, where a preacher follows a lectionary or some other systematic approach to biblical or doctrinal preaching, the appropriateness of a sermon on death would present itself automatically. Finally, where devoting a whole sermon to the subject of death may not be appropriate, the preacher may find many opportunities for developing insights into the Christian understanding of death by way of illustration, or by giving attention to it in sections or sub-sections of a sermon. It should be stressed, however, that preaching on death should not be left entirely to chance, nor can it be assumed that because the opportunity presents itself in the form either of personal need or through following a lectionary, the opportunity will be seized. The preacher must give attention to the subject of death in his preaching program in a sensitive and intentional way.

Death and the Church as a Socializing Agent. The Church is one agent entrusted with the task of socializing for death.² This means that it must help to educate not only its own members, but persons in the society at large, as to the meaning and the appropriate responses to death. The Church is, of course, not the only institution given this

²James Thomas Mathieu, "Dying and Death Role-Expectation: A Comparative Analysis" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1972), p. 21.

responsibility. It shares this task with the medical care system and the cultural system as well. Yet, it carries a major share of the burden despite the widespread secularization of our society.

In a doctoral dissertation written at the University of Southern California in 1972, James T. Mathieu undertook an investigation of the effectiveness of institutional religion as well as the other two systems we have mentioned as socializing agents.³ He studied them in terms both of what was prescribed by the society in general, and what was expected by individuals to be the result of the socializing process. He wanted to determine how "congruent" the social prescriptions for the socializing agents were with the individual's expectations.⁴ Did religion (or medicine or culture) deliver what it was supposed to?

Mathieu's findings were very disturbing! None of the socializing agencies socialized for death and dying!⁵

Medicine tended to see its role as caring for the health of the individual. While this could include both the prolongation of life and its improvement, mere prolongation seemed to be chief priority.⁶ As medicine has sharpened its technology to meet this demand, it has increasingly shut the patient out of decision-making roles and shielded him from the kinds of information necessary to influencing the course of his

³Ibid., p. 4.

⁴Ibid., p. 5.

⁵Ibid., on medicine p. 22; on religion p. 25; on culture p. 26.

⁶Ibid., p. 30.

treatment or dealing with his own needs.⁷ The patient tends to be made increasingly dependent on the medical care system. At the same time he is deprived of the resources necessary to deal with death with understanding and affirmation. Since the medical care system understands itself as promoting health, it tends to see death as a failure of the system.⁸ It thus has also tended to isolate the dying patient.⁹ Transferrals from treating hospitals to "convalescent" or "nursing" hospitals are becoming more frequent. Apparently, according to Mathieu, the medical care system is a socializing agent only up to, but not for, death.

American culture, on the other hand, has also failed to socialize for death. It has tended to remove death from the experience of most people, isolating the sick and dying, especially the dying, in special institutions.¹⁰ Thus contact with the dying is reduced. Even the incidence of death itself is reduced through technology. Specializing the handling of the dead, and creating certain taboos against the discussion of death or the expression of grief in public remove death from ordinary experience even further.¹¹ Until very recently, death was simply not a subject for conversation. Yet, death has always remained a fact of existence, a fact about which, even without discussion, the

⁷Ibid., p. 31.

⁸Ibid., p. 22-24.

⁹Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 44.

¹¹Ibid., p. 45.

culture has had much to say. What it attempts to say is that death is not fearful (don't talk about it and maybe it will go away); and it is something to get over quickly (paint and dress the body well and perhaps we may pretend that it is sleeping). Mathieu suggests that, whereas our taboos on talking about death may at one time have been intended to relieve fears about death (where death was a common, everyday occurrence, for example), it almost certainly increases fears today.¹² Again, the individual must learn to die alone.

Where the medical care system and the cultural system have failed to help educate for the meaning of death and the way to respond to it, surely the Church must be making some contribution. At first glance this seems plausible, for the Church, at least, is one place where death can be discussed: here it is not the blatant failure that medicine takes it to be. And the Church is the one prescribed to handle death when it occurs despite the ordinary cultural taboos. Yet, this rosy picture is not what it at first appears.

Religion, too, has failed to socialize for death and dying. The essential components of the religious system's approach to death, according to Mathieu is, on the one hand a great optimism about the future beyond death, and on the other an unspoken sense of fear and apprehension which, because it is unspoken, also tends to prohibit a meaningful encounter with death.¹³ Religion socializes for an after-life, but not for death, according to Mathieu.

¹²Ibid., p. 46.

¹³Ibid., p. 39.

Perhaps the most startling finding which Mathieu reports is that religious persons may not only not be educated for death, they may actually evidence a greater fear of it than their non-religious counterparts.

Fear of death has been found to be related to religious affiliation by (three major studies). Further, Feifel found that among those he studied, the religious person, when compared with the non-religious person, was in general personally more afraid of death.¹⁴

This is a strong indictment, in our view, of the failure of religion in this crucial area.

The preacher plays a central role in interpreting and communicating the Christian faith. It is he who stands in the best position to begin to respond to the need for the Church to fulfill its role as a socializing agent in relation to death and dying. If he is to do this, he must be fully apprised of the situation into which he is venturing. The preacher cannot any longer assume that some other agency will fulfill the human need to understand and be able to affirm death.

We believe that Mathieu's findings present an urgent demand that every minister of the Christian faith should seek to answer, namely providing a place and a way to allow persons to deal with death and all its attendant fears, feelings and meanings. At least one way to do this is to begin to take the preaching task seriously and proclaim as relevantly and appropriately as possible what the Gospel has to say about death.

Death and the Dynamics of Personality. The psychoanalytical

¹⁴Ibid., p. 40f.

approach to the human experience has had a vast impact on our contemporary consciousness. Its basic premise alone would qualify it as an important factor to be considered in the orientation of the preacher toward death. This premise is that human beings are driven by forces over which they have only limited control, and indeed, only a dim awareness. The sub-conscious is a great reservoir of primitive fears and feelings which from time to time wells up onto the daily living patterns of individuals and causes various sorts of strange, "neurotic" behavior. But, of course, this is not all that holds importance for the preacher concerned with death. One of the most persistent elements in Freud's life and work was what he called the "death-instinct", a notion that somehow, all human beings seek out death and that this "drive" toward death constitutes one of the most essential motivating forces in the sub-conscious.¹⁵

Ernest Becker has recently presented a major work re-interpreting the fundamental Freudian categories, and re-presenting the psychoanalytical approach in a broader social-historical-religious context. His work is quite comprehensive and thorough. We could not begin to scratch the surface of it here. Yet, a significant insight is advanced by Becker which could aid anyone who must orient himself to preaching on death. The insight is suggested in the book's title: The Denial of Death.

Becker believes that the place where traditional psychoanalysis went wrong is its insistence that sexuality itself is the root of man's

¹⁵Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: Free Press, 1973), p. 97-99.

culture, and also his frustrations and neuroses. Suppression of sexuality is, of course, an easily attestable phenomenon in almost any culture. Freudian concepts grew up in a period, moreover, when various sociological and anthropological studies were first beginning to gain the status of scientific inquiries, with the net effect being the input of many cultural comparisons in which the peculiar Western approach to sexuality came under increasing scrutiny and judgment. Yet, even as many of Freud's own pupils quickly pointed out, sexuality and its suppression cannot begin to account for all the pathological problems in our culture, not to mention the non-pathological expressions of culture--e.g., in art, religion, literature. There must be a more comprehensive category.

Becker suggests that two men were responsible for providing us with just such a comprehensive account of human experience, though it has taken us some time to appreciate their accomplishments. The first pre-dated Freud, the second was one of Freud's early pupils. The first was essentially a religious writer, while the second was a scientist who became interested increasingly not only in religion, but also in art. The first man is Søren Kierkegaard; the second is Otto Rank.

What both men discovered, according to Becker, is that man is terror-struck at his own mortality.¹⁶ This does not mean merely that he is afraid to die. It means much more. Man is painfully aware of his limitations, of the finitude of his resources and the failures of his best efforts. Man is that creature who is oriented to the radical openness of the future and the questionableness of his own situation.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 11.

He stands precariously on the brink of a deep, foreboding chasm; what he is, what he must do, where he must go, what will become of him are all unknown and unknowable quantities. Yet, despite this basic questionableness, man is also aware of "immortal longings" deep inside him. This means not so much that he wants to live forever, though that too is included. It is much more the case that he wants to give a decisive and full account of himself, to clear up the riddle of his being, to do something grandiose. Man wants to be, but fears being. Man's essential situation is thoroughly ambiguous, and for that reason, thoroughly characterized by anxiety.¹⁷

The terror of mortality is expressed for Kierkegaard by Becker in these words: "to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression--and all this yet to die."¹⁸ Yet, the answer in the face of this situation is not a final "No," but a leaping into it to discover what it has to say about our present experience. The Philistine in Kierkegaard shrinks back from this leap.¹⁹ He occupies himself in a hundred little ways to avoid having to face the terror of mortality. The faithful man "leaps" into the chasm on the edge of which he finds himself. What enables him to leap is trust that there is a Creator who cares, nothing more, nothing less.²⁰ But the

¹⁷Ibid., p. 25-27.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 81.

²⁰Ibid., p. 90.

leap results in something amazing: the confrontation with the terror of mortality is what leads to maturity. Terror is a "school," a school that instructs us in the possibilities of our life situation.²¹ By leaping in faith, we realize the opportunity to do something significant, and to give up the trivial. "The self must be broken in order to become a self," claims Kierkegaard.²² This being broken in order to come to oneself is the meaning of self-transcendence. The petty heroisms suggested by culture, and practiced by common men in order to forget their mortality, their essential creatureliness, are empty. One cannot move beyond them without also giving them up, and giving oneself away to a kind of "cosmic Heroism," that is, to God.²³ This is no easy answer, for it means pursuing the hard road through mortality rather than circumventing it.

Rank pursued the line of thinking represented by Kierkegaard, but with the scientist's rigor. He gave an accounting of sexuality, and the part it plays in man's confronting or avoiding mortality. It is complicated and very thorough.²⁴ We cannot here trace his steps. We must however point to the way in which, as Becker puts it, Rank made closure on Kierkegaard, that is, how he finished many of Kierkegaard's insights with the findings of psychoanalysis. For Rank, all men must offer themselves up to being whether they wish to realize it or not.

²¹Ibid., p. 87.

²²Ibid., p. 88.

²³Ibid., p. 91.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 160-63.

The common man, Kierkegaard's philistine, does so in the forms of heroism prescribed by his society.²⁵ The burden of breaking with society is too great, and it comes in the form of guilt. The artist, however, is one who offers himself on his own terms. At first this seems presumptuous, and not at all like Kierkegaard's leap of faith. Yet, to make such an offering means also to realize what a risk one is taking. Because this offering is made, not to the society and on its terms, but to being itself, the artist does not have the luxury of knowing beforehand how his "heroism" will be regarded, how acceptable it is. Instead of presumptuousness, the artist is really more like the madman, very much alone, very much aware of his own limits, very much the mortal.²⁶ His only hope is to give his gift to the highest level of being possible. This is where religion comes in for Rank. Religion is far from being a crutch. Of course, there are many religious forms of crutches. But in pursuing and giving to the highest level of being, one is taking the most difficult path. "To renounce the world and oneself, to lay the meaning of it to the powers of creation, is the hardest thing for man to achieve," and interestingly, "it is fitting that this task should fall to the strongest personality type, the one with the largest ego."²⁷

Now Becker combines these insights to give a cogent reinterpretation of the psychoanalytical terms. His thesis is that man's essential situation is one of mortality, and his psychic life is spent largely

²⁵Ibid., p. 172.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., p. 173.

in avoiding or overcoming this painful awareness.²⁸ When the infant is born, he is utterly dependent on the world around him. Without support he will literally die. Though the child grows into different stages, and is increasingly able to exercise control over his environment, this basic apprehension of dependence is never lost. It colors everything a man does. In order to keep from going entirely mad, men occupy themselves with various projects.²⁹ This pre-occupation with projects for the sake of avoiding mortality makes all of us more or less neurotic.³⁰ It does not seem possible, however, to be fully and always aware of the exact precariousness of our existence. So the ideal goal would seem to be a freedom to be aware of the limits of our existence, to be fully apprised of our finitude--not only in terms of death itself but in all things. Yet also to be able to give ourselves to a carefully chosen project that integrates well with this feature of reality. Such a project cannot itself be trivial, close at hand, self-made. Becker brings his book to a close with a call for a human heroism that goes beyond where our society has so far brought us:

Modern man is drinking and drugging himself out of awareness, or he spends his time shopping, which is the same thing. As awareness calls for types of heroic dedication that this culture no longer provides for him, society contrives to help him forget. Or, alternatively he buries himself in psychology in the belief that awareness by itself will be some kind of magical cure for his problems.

...the only way to get beyond the natural contradictions of existence (is) in the time-worn religious way: to project one's problems onto a god-figure, to be healed by an all-embracing and

²⁸Ibid., p. 17-19.

²⁹Ibid., p. 47-49.

³⁰Ibid., p. 183.

all-justifying beyond.³¹

As in Kierkegaard and Rank, this is no mere crutch, a panacea to be taken in liberal doses. This "projecting of one's problems" is a demanding task, for it means first facing those problems squarely. And the fundamental problem is facing death, and all that it means about our human situation.

Becker's insights aid the project of preaching on death in both helping us to grasp the essential features of the human situation from the psychological perspective, and in pointing out the way in which we may be of assistance in dealing with death itself thus overcoming the kind of deficiency described by James Mathieu. Becker reminds us that our task is not to force people to stare death in the face every moment, nor, of course, to provide ready options for their further distraction. Instead, the task to which all in the healing professions--psychological or religious--are called is to help people face what is real, and respond to it with their whole being in trust and boldness. We are especially heartened to find that the richness of the Christian tradition is taken into account in a fully integral way by one who is primarily concerned to give a scientific description of the denial of death. While Becker calls, as we have seen, for a human heroism, we must immediately understand that this is far from being the concept of a self-made man, a defeat of death by personal resources. Becker shows the depth of the Christian understanding of death, (the heroism that transcends death) when he writes:

This is the most remarkable achievement of the Christian world

³¹Ibid., p. 284-85.

picture: that it could take slaves, cripples, imbeciles, the simple and the mighty, and make them all heroes, simply by taking a step back from the world into another dimension of things, the dimension called heaven. Or we might better say that Christianity took creature-consciousness--the thing man most wanted to deny--and made it the very condition for his cosmic heroism.³²

Conclusion

We have seen that the minister is called to speak to the problem of death in at least three distinct settings. What he will say and how he will say it will, in large measure, be determined by the setting which he perceives. Underlying each situation, however, is the observation that the Church has largely failed in its task of interpreting death and educating its people to meet it or deal with it. This observation creates its own sense of urgency which the sensitive minister will seek to answer. The failure of the Church as an institution as to the nature of death and its place in life are wrong, however. We have also seen that at least one major attempt to reinterpret the insights of the psychoanalytical approach to human behavior believes the Christian understanding of mortality, and the way to respond to it lies at the base of the more mature development of psychoanalysis. The notion that man's essential behavior is characterized by an attitude of the denial of death is of immediate importance to the preacher. He is reminded that it is only in faithful obedience to the will of God, obedience that must follow the way of the Cross, that one receives the gift of life in abundance. In this last observation, we are poised already on the brink of the whole project. We will turn then to the proper study of our topic.

³²Ibid., p. 160.

Chapter 2

THE EXEGETICAL TOOLS

In this chapter we will proceed to develop a pattern for exegesis of biblical texts relating to death and dying. In order to do this, we will first consider the relation of exegesis to hermeneutic, then we will elaborate one pattern for exegetical study. Following this treatment, which will end with a summary of the pattern, we will turn to consider three specific tools to be used in the final chapter of this essay: (1) a summary of the principles of The New Rhetoric and its relevance for exegesis;¹ (2) a survey of five Early Fathers and their ideas concerning death, after the fashion of Jaroslav Pelikan's The Shape of Death;² (3) an investigation of the primary words with which we shall be concerned in the last chapter.

We believe these three tools will form an indispensable resource for the further consideration of preaching on death. In the case of two of these tools, The New Rhetoric and the investigations into the Fathers, we believe our use of them will constitute a necessary and somewhat novel approach to the exegesis of texts. We will show, in each case, how these particular tools are relevant for exegesis.

¹Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

²Jaroslav Pelikan, The Shape of Death (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961).

EXEGESIS

Exegesis and Hermeneutic

Exegesis is to be distinguished from hermeneutic.³ Exegesis is here understood as the process of coming to understand a text within its own context and in its own terms. Hermeneutic is understood as the process of probing the possible ways in which a word spoken in another context and a prior time can have meaning in a given situation at the present time. Thus, exegesis directs our efforts and attention to the text, while hermeneutic indicates the way in which the text directs itself, if at all, to us.

Exegesis involves the interpreter in the disciplines of historical research. It attempts to distance the interpreter and his world of thought from the text and its world, in order that the text may be freed from the arbitrary prejudices of the interpreter and speak out of its own integrity.

Hermeneutic, on the other hand, has steadily moved away from the preoccupation it once had on specific methodologies, and has come to be seen as a tool for elucidating understanding itself.⁴ It attempts to describe how understandings are shaped, for example, by language.

It is here that we confront a rather major problem, however.

³James M. Robinson, "Hermeneutic Since Barth," in James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (eds.), The New Hermeneutic (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 4.

⁴Ibid.

Since exegesis is directed to the text in order to understand it as fully as possible in its own terms, it must use historical tools; these are largely linguistic in nature and consist in asking the text several specialized questions. Yet, these tools are themselves shaped by our own understandings and presuppositions. We must then inquire whether exegesis without presuppositions is possible.⁵

We believe that Rudolf Bultmann is correct in drawing a distinction between presuppositions understood as cultural biases, what we have called "arbitrary prejudices" above, and presuppositions as basic pre-understandings which have to do with the interpreter's expectations and conceptual options--with his own life situation--over which he has little direct control. In this latter sense, presuppositions are always present and cannot be dismissed. We believe they deserve special attention, in fact. In the former sense, however, the influence of presuppositional thinking can be limited through careful and critical analysis of the text--careful in the sense of competent use of scholarly research and critical in the sense of a continuing appraisal of oneself and one's methods as they impinge on the text. As Bultmann observes, this kind of exegesis is not only possible but mandatory.

In the light of the foregoing, we maintain that our distinction between hermeneutic and exegesis is appropriate, and would summarize it as follows: Hermeneutic reflects on the process of interpretation (it

⁵Rudolf Bultmann, Existence and Faith (New York: Meridian Books; 1966), p. 299.

asks, "What does our interpretation say?"), while exegesis is the process of interpretation in action (it asks, "What does the text, the object of interpretation, say?"). Exegesis precedes hermeneutic. Thus, exegesis may proceed but always in a tentative way and always with a view to what our hermeneutic may find with regard, not to the text itself, but to ourselves.

We will now consider a specific methodology for exegesis. We shall make use of two approaches here and seek for a concise treatment of procedure. We must keep in mind that exegesis is directed to the text, and thus, will not and cannot answer the question of the text's meaning to and for us.

The Intention of Exegesis

Werner G. Kummel states that there are two intentions which exegesis can serve. The first is the quest for historical knowledge. The second is for the subject matter and its personal meaning for the researcher.⁶

Dwight Stevenson, on the other hand, is more specific in understanding the intention of exegesis as serving the task of preaching. Nevertheless, the minister as preacher must be "kept. . . in the outer office" while the minister as student (researcher) goes to work on the exegesis.⁷

⁶Werner G. Kummel, "New Testament Exegesis," in Otto Kaiser and Werner G. Kummel, Exegetical Method (New York: Seabury Press, 1963) p. 35.

⁷Dwight E. Stevenson, In The Biblical Preacher's Workshop (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), p. 70.

Kümmel believes it is important to clarify the two intentions in exegesis; but even where the kerygmatic function is the ultimate aim, the first intention (historical knowledge) is the way to, and therefore, takes precedence over the second (preaching for existential meaning).

Procedure

On the matter of procedure, Kümmel asserts that it will vary according to the text.⁸ His reflections, therefore, are intended to present questions or points of research, all of which are to be taken into account.

Stevenson offers a more structured pattern. He assures the reader that the pattern may be modified, adapted or discarded, but points out that it has served "several generations of seminary students" and ministers in the parish in need of such a method.⁹ Because it has the practical value of having been of use in actual experience, we shall follow this helpful step-by-step approach. We will, of course, correct or augment this plan as may seem appropriate.

The first step in the pattern is the selection of a text. The primary criterion in selection is significance, not length. One should select a text that is "somewhere near the center and not on the margins of the biblical world."¹⁰ This has special significance for selecting

⁸Kümmel, p. 47.

⁹Stevenson, p. 60.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 61.

a text dealing with death. One is tempted to choose texts simply for the fact that they contain the word "death" (or some idea or concept connected with it), rather than selecting those texts that strike close to the heart of the Christian message. On the other hand, there are a large number of texts suitable to preaching on death which do not contain the word at all.

The second step in the pattern is to place the text in context. For Stevenson, this means to see the individual text in relation to the Old Testament, New Testament, the history of Israel's religion, church history, and so on. It also includes knowledge of the biblical book of which the text is a part; this requires an outline of the book. Here must be answered the questions as to who wrote the book, to whom, when and under what circumstances. The question must also be asked how the text fits in with the message of the book as a whole. For texts on death and dying, these questions are crucial for often in the development of theologies concerning death, the matters dealing with context are completely overlooked. Stevenson is correct in asserting that one's "final bearing" must be obtained from considering the relation of the text to the affirmation that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," i.e., the central affirmation of the Scriptures.¹¹

We feel the need here to augment Stevenson's second step with Kummel's observation that the "beginning and end of a section must be carefully defined", because the traditional divisions of the text, the

¹¹Ibid., p. 64.

"ecclesiastical pericopes" are often not reliable.¹² In fact, it is our experience that even where sections of a text can be confidently demarcated, simple joining words (e.g., and, but, so, therefore) often give a text a different meaning when the text is read in the largest possible context. Great care, then, should be used in excluding material from the context.

The third step is to spell out the meaning of the text. Stevenson calls this step alone "exegesis." By that he includes determining the type of literature the text is and applying to it what has been traditionally called "special hermeneutic":

Every biblical text is part of a literature and as such falls under the canons of a particular literary type. These canons must be known and applied, else meaning is distorted.¹³

These canons would be the description of the genres employed, the locating of the setting in life, and a knowledge of how the various forms were used in their own time. The third step also includes the matter of translation. This is what Klummel calls "linguistic understanding" and he indicates two types of specific information sought here: first, the various possible meanings of ambiguous words, and second, the various possible meanings for grammatically ambiguous constructions.¹⁴ This step also includes a phrase by phrase, word by word study of the text with special attention given to the biblical

¹²Klummel, p. 44.

¹³Stevenson, p. 66.

¹⁴Klummel, p. 39.

languages. Finally this step includes the use of critical introductions, and commentaries, to enlighten the researcher regarding both the "assured results" and the lingering uncertainties concerning a text. The value of this step cannot be overly stressed in view of the fact that much dogmatics has rested on rather flimsy texts, especially in the area of death.

The fourth step in Stevenson's pattern is to put oneself into the text. Stevenson maintains that God makes a claim through the Scriptures on the reader. He agrees with R. Bultmann that every text calls for a "personal decision."¹⁵ Since Scripture is understood as dialogue, or encounter, it is important for the interpreter to ask, "Where do I enter the conversation? What is the dialogue between God and me to which this passage points?"¹⁶ In our understanding, this is a hermeneutical insertion into an exegetical process. It presupposes that the nature of the scriptural word can be understood on the model of dialogue, or demand. This kind of judgment appears to be premature and must not yet enter into the exegetical process.

The fifth step in the pattern is to seek for the internal unity of the text. Under this heading, Stevenson suggests that the researcher write three things: (1) a proposition, a simple declarative statement setting forth the theme of the text which would then become the theme of the sermon; (2) an aim, a statement of the object of the text, what it

¹⁵Stevenson, p. 68.

¹⁶Ibid.

is intended to accomplish--this would become the aim of the sermon;
(3) a key verse, if there is one, which "has the virtue of stating the proposition of the passage and of the sermon in biblical language."¹⁷
We must criticize this step on the basis of our understanding of exegesis, as well as on the basis of Stevenson's own work. In terms of exegesis, this step subordinates the text itself to the pressing need to sermonize. It begs the question whether all texts, especially texts relating to death, can be stated in propositional form.¹⁸ It replaces the text with the proposition, then appears to make use of the key verse as a proof text, bolstering the proposition and aim. We believe that Stevenson's intuition regarding the internal unity of the text might better be served by an observation which he himself makes under the next step in his pattern, namely that there is a distinction between internal unity conceived as a structural outline and the dynamics of the text as the way in which this structure moves.¹⁹ We would maintain this step in the pattern, but would suggest that the way to arrive at the internal unity would be by careful, structural analysis in written form. What English grammarians used to call "diagramming a sentence" would here be used in relation to a whole text. The point is to see how the units fit together.

The sixth step, already anticipated, is to discover the dynamics of the text. This means "probing for the movement, the development of

¹⁷Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁸We would think, e.g., of expletives, or prayers.

¹⁹Stevenson, p. 69.

the text."²⁰ The dynamics capture the "living situation" out of which the passage came. The dynamics are found by asking such questions as these: "What is the creative tension? What is the conflict? What is at issue? What movement is there in the text--changes in time, place, attitude, deepening understandings, progress or regress of character, etc. Is there a climax? What is the outcome?"²¹ We believe that the element of movement is important in two ways: (1) that movement which can be detected in the text itself, (2) that movement which the text represents within its own world. This latter kind of movement will, in part at least, be found in studying the larger cultural context out of which the text comes. Here, attention must be given to the range of possible ideas and expressions which were current in the text's own time. Here, the question of why the text chose its terms and manner of expression instead of other possible alternatives must be asked. We realize that certainty in this area is not always to be found. Yet, as the recent and continuing debate over "resurrection" and "immortality" shows,²² it is necessary to investigate why a writer chose certain terms and did not choose others; why, in short, the text moves in its own particular direction either with or against its cultural companions.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Krister Stendahl (ed.) Immortality and Resurrection (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 3; see also Pierre Benoit and Roland Murphy (eds.) Immortality and Resurrection (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), pp. 7-8.

The seventh and final step in Stevenson's pattern is to write a precis of the text. This is a paraphrase in the researcher's own words intended to summarize the result of the research undertaken.

Concise Treatment of Procedure

Here, we wish to state an outline, the summary of what we have said regarding exegesis.

Intention: Exegesis analyzes a text systematically for the purpose of preaching. The preaching task must await the exegetical findings.

Procedure:

1. Text selection.

Chief criterion is significance defined as centrality in relation to the Christian message.

2. Text in Context.

- a. Obtain a book outline.
- b. Recheck beginning and ending of text.
- c. Place text in the idea-context of the book.
- d. Place the text in relation to OT, NT theology, and history of ideas--including the "central affirmation of the Scriptures".

3. Spell out the meaning of the text.

- a. Identify literary type or genre.
- b. Locate the "setting in life".
- c. Word studies.
- d. Grammatical analysis.
- e. Consultation of commentaries, introductions, articles, etc.

4. Seek for the internal unity of the text.
Diagram the structure of the text.

5. Discover the dynamics of the text.
 - a. Internal movement; place, time, attitude changes; tensions, climax, resolutions.
 - b. External movement; analysis of the relation of the text to other literatures, ideas where known.
6. Write a precis of the text.
Paraphrase in one's own words what the text says.

THE NEW RHETORIC

We feel the need at this juncture to describe the use of a very rich tool in the exegetical process outlined in The New Rhetoric by Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca.²³ We were introduced to this tool by Dr. F. O. Francis, head of the Department of Religion and New Testament professor at Chapman College.

The New Rhetoric reopens the investigation of argumentation. Its basic thesis is that all speech that is not demonstration, that is, which does not simply point to what is self-evident, is speech that is aimed at gaining the adherence of minds, that seeks to convince or to persuade. It challenges the long-held notion that the rational ability in man is primarily concerned with explicating what is self-evident and whatever does not yield itself univocally to such explication must be accounted for on the basis of an intrusion of the irrational:

It is the idea of self-evidence as characteristic of reason which we must assail, if we are to make place for a theory of argumentation that will acknowledge the use of reason in directing our own actions and influencing those of others.²⁴

²³Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca.

²⁴Ibid., p. 3.

Self-evidence is a form of adherence of the mind to certain "facts". It is a form of intensity of adherence, but only one form. As such, what is self-evident is not necessarily true. And forms of argumentation cannot be restricted only to what is self-evident.

The distinctive genius of the New Rhetoric is its insistence that ". . . argumentation. . . oriented to the future. . . sets out to bring about some action, or to prepare for it by acting, by discursive methods, on the minds of the hearers."²⁵ Thus, nondemonstrational language is action-language. Adherence of minds is a facilitator of action even in cases where the action is only implied or actually hidden, as in the epideictic genre.²⁶ We will maintain that the New Testament's pronouncements on death and life have the character of arguments calling for action or response and are not intended to be referred to the realm of "ideas" or of speculation.

Furthermore, the importance of argumentation comes, not only from the fact that it influences actions, but also because "Argumentation alone. . . allows us to understand our decisions."²⁷ It is this two-dimensional function of argumentation, its action orientation, and its elucidation of understanding, that makes the New Rhetoric an important tool for exegesis. By studying the influence of the methods of argumentation on the arrangement and direction of the arguments in the

²⁵Ibid., p. 47.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

New Testament, we come to a greater understanding of the texts we shall be concerned with.

The Contact of Minds

Argumentation develops in terms of the audience to which it is addressed.²⁸ This means that in order for argumentation to proceed, there must be a modicum of agreement or contact between the speaker (writer) and his audience (or readers). The minimum required is a shared language. But the minimum is not enough. A community of interests is what characterizes the contact of minds. The notion of a contact of minds has great implications for argumentation, for a "good" argument will be one that will promote this contact through increasing adherence to the ideas advanced. Argumentation is fraught with dangers, however, for it is also possible to raise ideas which will cause objections in the audience and will lead to a dissolution of the contact of minds.

Exactly what constitutes the audience is difficult to state with precision, however. Audience is a construct in the understanding of the speaker. As a rule, a speaker or writer (especially writers) will address his ideas to the widest possible audience. This is termed the universal audience. The universal audience cannot be demonstrated statistically, but represents the totality of minds for which an argument is intended to have weight. A philosopher will write to promote

²⁸Ibid., pp. 14-47.

ideas which would gain the assent of every thinking person. Even a scientist addressing a limited gathering of colleagues on a rather well-defined subject presupposes an audience of all educated, clear-thinking minds.

On occasion, it will be determined by the writer/speaker that adherence of the universal audience is not possible. The argumentation will then be addressed to an elite audience, and special techniques will be employed. Already, however, this adjustment has great weight in determining how a passage or an idea is to be interpreted.

The Starting Point of Argumentation

There are three elements that constitute the starting point for argumentation: agreement as to the data, choice of the data, and presentation of the data.

Agreement.²⁹ What makes it possible to begin an argument is that, to some degree, the audience and the speaker/writer agree as to the terms of the argument. Therefore, "analysis of argumentation is concerned (from start to finish) with what is supposed to be accepted by the hearers." The audience always reserves the right to disagree or dissolve the discussion, of course, but even where one wants to take issue with a notion firmly held to by a given audience, one will have to begin on the audience's home ground.

Agreements in argumentation are of two basic types: the real and the preferable. The agreements as to the real are made up of

²⁹Ibid., pp. 65-114.

"facts," "truths," and "presumptions."³⁰ These represent varying degrees of intensity and self-consciousness of adherence, but are usually accepted by the audience as an essential feature of reality. Facts relate usually to what is objective in reality; truths refer to the way in which reality is ordered in the minds of the audience. Both facts and truths are precarious in that, simply to raise questions about them is to weaken their strength as a link in the argumentative chain. Presumptions relate to what the audience conceives as "normal" for the culture in which it lives. Presumptions increase in validity as they are reinforced in the course of argumentation while facts and truths diminish.

Agreements as to the preferable are made up of "values," hierarchies of values, and loci communes or the commonplaces of speech.³¹ Agreement on a value means "an admission that an object, a being, or an ideal must have a specific influence on action or on disposition toward action". Furthermore, this influence is a resource for argumentation though it is not thought of as binding on everybody. Truth, beauty and the good are typical examples of values. A peculiar characteristic of values in argumentation is that the more general they are, the more likely the assent which the audience will give them. As soon as a value is translated in terms of specifics, controversy develops. Often, a resolution of the controversy is sought by shifting the argument from the realm of values to the realm of facts, the thought being that the

³⁰Ibid., pp. 67-73.

³¹Ibid., pp. 74-95.

argument will have a firmer ground on the "objective." Actually, since "facts" and "values" are both forms of agreement or adherence of minds, rhetoric reveals this tactic for what it is, an argumentative device, rather than a necessary move in logic. Hierarchies are values arranged in order of priorities. Since many cultures hold the same, or nearly the same values, what is distinctive in thought and argumentation is the way in which these values are related to one another. The Loci communes, or "commonplaces" are those conveniences in thought which are everywhere present and which usually do not draw attention to themselves in the process of argumentation: for example, the cause is superior to effect (locus of quality), more is better than less (the locus of quantity), the more rational a man is the more fully human he is (the locus of essence), a thing that is is superior to something that is not (the locus of existence). This list is not exhaustive but suggestive. Commonplaces are widely used in developing arguments and ideas, and a careful study of them reveals where the speaker is in relation to his audience. They may be used in combination, and reflect, often, presumptions established earlier.

Choice.³² The choice of data is crucial to understanding an argument, and is rarely without significance. The use of qualifiers, for example, demonstrates the kind of agreements which the audience is supposed to have. Moreover, analysis of qualifiers reveals the kinds of actions to which the speaker/writer is pointing: ". . . every conceptual

³²Ibid., pp. 115-141.

thought is inserted into frameworks that are already completely formed, which one must use and manipulate so as best to serve the necessities of action upon others."³³

Presentation.³⁴ The term "presentation" not only points to the act of unravelling an argument, but also the making present or giving "presence" to the terms of the argument itself so that action will be facilitated. "Presence" is the goal, in a sense, of all argumentation. Thus, the use of verbal tenses, the choice of "modalities," the subordination and coordination of clauses, the use of figures of speech are all intended to give an argument present reality or force, and influence the audience to respond. The New Rhetoric regards all the modalities--the assertive, the injunctive (imperative), the interrogatory, and the optative (praying or wishing) as containing at the very least standards by which actions can be measured, and more usually a call to action proper.³⁵

Since the New Testament is widely understood as kerygma, a call for active response to the love and grace of God, we believe the categories of the New Rhetoric are especially appropriate. We maintain that theology has often given attention to the content of the New Testament kerygma at the expense of or in spite of its development as argumentation, seeking the adherence of minds for the sake of action. This has

³³Ibid., p. 127.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 142-183.

³⁵Ibid., p. 154.

been especially true in the area of death, life after death, and so on. We shall attempt, by applying the insights of the New Rhetoric, to understand a NT text on its own terms, in the way in which it proceeds and develops. We shall seek for the action a text aims at, and in this way come to understand why certain terms were employed, what the agreements were between the audience and the writer which necessitated the use of these terms and their specific ordering and presentation. We understand this technique as directed to the text, and so consonant with our understanding of the goal of exegesis; and we contend that this tool is as vital as, for example, word-studies which, if concentrated on alone, tend to reify and conceptualize beyond the text. We shall utilize the insights of the New Rhetoric alongside word-studies and the other exegetical procedures confident that this will yield more fruitful results in the probing of the New Testament.

THE EARLY FATHERS

We turn now to a consideration of a resource which we believe will be helpful in fulfilling our exegetical process (discovering the dynamics of the text through "external movement"), namely, a study of the direction in which the Early Fathers of the Church moved in their understandings of death in relation to the NT. We are indebted to the work of Jaroslav Pelikan in his Laidlaw Lectures of 1959.³⁶ We had originally intended simply to recapitulate Dr. Pelikan's findings here.

³⁶Pelikan.

But on closer examination of the Fathers in his study, we felt the need to summarize and develop their positions with a particular view to our purposes. This extended discussion falls more appropriately here, we believe, than in any later section.

Dr. Pelikan offers us sketches of death and dying as approached by five early fathers: Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Origen, and Irenaeus. He describes each writer's ideas in terms of geometrical shapes or symbols as follows: the arch of existence, the circle of immortality, the triangle of mortality, the parabola of eternity, and the spiral of history. He concludes his study with this succinct statement of what these symbols mean:

The arc of existence emphasizes the finality of death. The circle of immortality represents the analogy between the life of man and the eternal life of God. The triangle of mortality says that even with an immortal soul a man must die to God and receive life from God. The parabola of eternity makes death God's way of bringing the soul back to himself. The spiral of history urges that the death of a man cannot be understood apart from the death of Adam and the death of Christ.³⁷

Pelikan seems at times to force the fathers into conforming with his "shapes." Nevertheless, his treatment is fruitful and leads him to conclude further, "The core of the Christian faith is pessimism about life and optimism about God and therefore hope for life in God." In answer to the question, "Is there any comprehensive figure or shape?,"³⁸ Pelikan offers the shape of the cross.

The cross leaves many questions unanswered, much of death uncharted. . . . All the clinical information about death at our disposal only

³⁷Ibid., p. 122.

³⁸Ibid., p. 121.

makes this mystery more profound and this wonder more haunting. The Christian view of death is not intended to supplement this clinical information with additional data about the human constitution. It is intended to give men the faith to live in courage and to die in dignity, knowing very little about the undiscovered country except that, by the grace of his cross, our Lord Jesus Christ has changed the shape of death. That is all we can know, that is all we need to know.³⁹

Yet, we wonder if this is all that can be said. We believe that Pelikan has done a fine job of analyzing the Early Fathers with a view to the content of their ideas. But his analysis does not indicate how their reflections on death "give men the faith to live in courage and to die in dignity." We believe that a study of the Fathers indicates not only the content of their beliefs, but the thrust of these beliefs as well, i.e., what they call on the reader to do, given these beliefs. We believe that it is important and instructive to examine how the Fathers took their cue from the New Testament kerygma and argued each in his own way for a particular response. We affirm Pelikan's notion that the Fathers exhibited a supreme confidence in God and in His future. But we also note that because of this confidence, the Fathers called upon their readers to respond to life and death in an active fashion. We affirm that the Fathers differed from one another in the constructs that form their ideas. We also maintain, however, that they all catch the thrust of the New Testament faith in relation to death, and that by following the path they cut we have a valuable tool for coming to understand what the New Testament writers themselves intended.

³⁹Ibid., p. 123.

Tatian⁴⁰

In Tatian's thought, "the dwelling place of the spirit is above, but the soul's origin is from beneath." Originally, the soul had a constant companion in the spirit. But because the soul would not follow the spirit's leading, they broke company. In this circumstance, the soul tended to fall "downward," that is, back into the material world from which it came and to which it belongs.

The soul "retains a spark" of the spirit's power, however. This explains both why men search for God, and why religions abound. The soul seems restless unless and until it finds some sort of spiritual satisfaction. The soul responds to the Spirit of God when it is touched by it; Tatian describes this as a relationship of mutual attraction. But "disobedient souls"--curiously, those who "reject the minister of the suffering God"--seem to wither, exhausting themselves of the meager spiritual resource left to them after the separation.

Just what is the soul in Tatian's thought? It is not a simple thing for him to describe. It is of necessity bound up with man's bodily existence: "It is composite so as to manifest itself through the body; for neither could it ever appear by itself without the body, nor does the flesh rise again without the soul."⁴¹ The soul does not necessarily set man apart from other creatures. Why, even the "croaking

⁴⁰Tatian, "Address to the Greeks," in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

⁴¹*Ibid.*, xv.

philosophers" of the Greeks impute a minimal level of intelligence to mere animals. And in any case, ". . . man excels the beasts in articulate language only--in other respects his manner of life is like theirs, as one who is not a likeness of God."⁴² It is this "likeness of God" that sets man apart, if he attains to any distinction at all. And this "likeness" is actualized only when God's Spirit comes to dwell, by reason of its attraction to the spiritual spark remaining in the soul, in the human form. When this happens, man begins to arise to meet his full potential as man, and does continue not as a merely human being. The soul remains intact with the body, however, and with the body it is still subject to dissolution, that is, to death.⁴³

Thus, in Tatian, the soul is very much conceived as it was in the Old Testament.⁴⁴ The soul is the presence of the life-force within the specific living form, but cannot be understood apart from it. The soul operates rather like an organizing principle around which the living form is configured. The soul longs for union with something beyond it, but is thwarted precisely by its own determination to live life on its terms. The spark of the divine spirit is perceived as an emptiness which beckons for fulfillment. The soul attempts to fill the emptiness by itself. Thus, the soul spins a web of partial truths, of distorted ideals, of mistaken gods, and it becomes ensnared in its own creation.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., Vol. II, xiii.

⁴⁴Pelikan, p. 29.

It is interesting to observe what Tatian does with the concept, Man. Man is the goal toward which human existence must strive. Human existence is characterized by those who possess "only soul."⁴⁵ But God intends more for Man than that he should remain at the level of the merely human. Man is on the way to becoming. This becoming is not accomplished by any specific act, it would appear, for Tatian is Pauline as regards the matter of faith. Yet, the human being who would press on toward his full Manhood can do something to affect his condition, namely, submit to the very death his race so much fears; ". . .men, after the loss of immortality, have conquered death by submitting to death in faith."⁴⁶

Death is the thing most feared by mankind. It stands as the final limit to the pretensions that characterize human being. For Tatian, the Greeks attempted in every imaginable way to evade the reality of death. The Stoics thought of endless cycles of life, rehearsing its failures and successes. Others spoke of despising death, thinking they would be freed to the world of the Ideas, as Plato taught. Yet, all were caught in the de-humanizing round of living without real understanding. All, even the most sophisticated of the philosophers, were caught up in the absurdities and perversities of myth, magic, and false fronts. Those who "despised death" made life despicable. Tatian recites a catalogue of cruelties and inhumanities which he maintained were the result of losing sight of man's basic mortality.

⁴⁵Tatian, Vol. II, xv.

⁴⁶Ibid.

The Christian response to this circumstance, according to Tatian, was to appropriate the correct understanding of man. God alone is without beginning and without end. God alone is the ground from which everything, visible and invisible, springs. Man is a creature, finite and mortal. He was not formed for mortality, for in Paradise he could have chosen to live in obedience to God and thus have obtained the gift of Life eternal. But through the exercise of his will in freedom, man chose his own way rather than obedience to God. Mercifully, God set a limit to his sinfulness in death.

Now, however, the tables are exactly reversed from the way they were set in Paradise. Again, man has the freedom to choose obedience. But this time, obedience means seeing oneself, and comporting oneself as a creature. It means accepting one's mortality and finitude.

The failure to do this results in a life rather like that lived by demons, Tatian says: "They die continually even while they remain alive." What he means is abundantly underscored throughout his work. Failure to accept one's finitude leads to all sorts of perversities and cruelties in the name of human power. Pretended infinitude means tyranny and slavery.

The only alternative is to give up the pretensions of immortality, so exalted by the Greeks--we could say by men in general--and quit striving for what does not belong to man as such. Man's hope consists wholly in obedience to a trustworthy God. This obedience has certain very practical and specific features to it. It means, in part at least, the acceptance of all men, even women, as equal before God, as brothers and sisters. It means the exercise of power, not for arrogant

or arbitrary ends, but for the sake of others. It means coming to know oneself as a creature and as dependent on God.

Tatian holds out the possibility for the re-constitution of man as a gift at the judgment. The same God who created a single human life out of nothing once, could certainly do so again, should he thus will. The Christian hope is that just this re-constitution, understood as intimacy with the Creator, as participating in God himself, is what will be given to the man of faith. But this "Life" that is eternal does not belong to man, and certainly is not characteristic of him. There is no adequate understanding of the term "immortality" outside the Christian hope, according to Tatian. Any other understanding is sheer folly. Tatian seems to sum up his confidence in God in the following words:

Even though fire destroy all traces of my flesh, the world receives the vaporized matter, and though dispersed through rivers and seas, or torn in pieces by wild beasts, I am laid up in the storehouses of a wealthy Lord.⁴⁷

The Lord indeed is wealthy, though man be exceedingly poor. Yet, nothing is lost, no matter how disintegrated things become. True Man is on the way to touching spirit with spirit. In the touch, he knows how far he is from the divine, how great the gift the divine bestows. Man's hope really consists in the affirmation of how limited he is, and a turning to receive what he can be in faith. The thrust in Tatian, then, is away from "immortality" as such and precisely toward acceptance of one's mortality. That man makes his situation worse by failing this acceptance is what Pelikan describes as pessimistic about life. On the

⁴⁷Ibid., Vol. II, vi.

other hand, Tatian is hopeful in God's future, and what this means for man. But we find his greatest contribution in the specific challenge to all to accept mortality as the way of human being, that is, to yield in trust in every human act including that of death.

Clement of Alexandria⁴⁸

Whereas Tatian began with both a disgust for Greek philosophy and a profound respect for the scriptures of the Christians that led him to conversion, Clement of Alexandria begins with a deep personal regard for Greek thinkers, and proposes to establish the Christian faith as the only true philosophy--as that which leads to perfect life. The importance of Tatian for the study of death is the way in which he derived his thought from a kind of Christian empiricism--that is, with direct reference to scripture and to experience interpreted through it. The importance of Clement is two-fold, however: first, is his own contribution to thought concerning death, developed largely out of classical Greek ideas and made to merge, if sometimes rather violently, with Christian concepts; second, and based on the first, is the new ground he broke for a later, more creative thinker in Origen, who, according to Tillich, returned to consider seriously the sources of Christian doctrine (in scripture) but who was, nevertheless, educated and impressed by Greek philosophical thought.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Clement of Alexandria, "Stromata," in Robertson and Donaldson, II.

⁴⁹Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 47.

Clement appears to try to steer a middle course between the popular Christianity of his time and place, and the more speculative gnostic sects. Thus, he blends both catholic Christianity and gnostic heresy.

The nature of man is to grow toward perfection. The ideal is to be "Such an one who is wholly a son, passionless, gnostic, perfect, formed by the teaching of the Lord; in order that in deed, in word, and in spirit itself, being brought close to the Lord, he may receive the mansion that is due him who has reached manhood thus."⁵⁰ Man was created as a unity for this purpose by the one God, the same Creator spoken of in the Old Testament. He was created both as soul and as body. Here intrudes the classical philosophical concept of the soul as a substance distinct from the body. With the Greeks, Clement even suggests that the soul may be pre-existent, known by the Logos before the actual creation. But against the Greeks, Clement argues that the soul is superior to the body, but not in the least better in the moral sense. Neither is the body a bad thing, an evil in itself, though to be sure, it is inferior to the soul. The reason for this resides in the creative purposes of God himself, who gave the body to the soul as a training ground in which the soul is to be disciplined. Unfortunately, the body has only death and corruption to look forward to, but this is as it should be for it will have adequately served its purpose by then. Clement makes much of the training aspect in his doctrine of man and

⁵⁰ Frank N. Magill (ed.) Masterpieces of Christian Literature in Summary Form (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 47.

salvation. It is possible for him to argue, unlike other gnostics, that marriage is a positive good, to be valued even above celibacy, because its temptation in matters of domesticity are helpful for the soul in its upward journey toward God. All the physical world exists to help train the soul. In the Instructor, Clement extends lengthy counsel on how the Christian is to live with matter and material things: the key is temperance and a certain indifference. But he never counsels complete abstinence or abhorrence of things material.

Man grows toward perfection of soul through steps. First comes faith, the basic condition for perfection; then come gnosis, knowledge, discipline in the higher duties and discoveries of the spiritual world; finally comes union with God through love--not a love typified by any desire, but an inner calm and peace. Since faith is basically a predisposition to believe, perfection must be won through discipline. The Logos, incarnate in the Christ, gives instruction in discipline to those who have already turned to him. Rightly understood, the Greek philosophers and the Hebrew prophets alike were instruments employed by the Logos to prepare all men for the pursuit of perfection. The preparatory period ended, men must choose to follow the Logos, and in the following to submit to his instruction. Such instruction leads to ever higher levels of understanding until, beyond the grave and freed from the bodily existence, the follower finds union with God. Clement retains faith over against gnostic tendencies, but seems to undercut its significance by insisting on the achievement of union with God based on the individual's success in self-discipline. In any case, the "mansion" one

receives, his being at home with God, is truly more a wage than a gift; it is his "due."

God's dealings with men consist, for Clement, almost entirely in his manifesting himself through the intermediary Logos. The Logos calls men farther up in their journey to perfection. He delivers instruction for them to follow. He even preaches to those already dead in Limbo in order to offer them the possibility of continuing their journey begun only under the philosophers or the prophets. But there is no "suffering God" in this system; no servant Messiah. Clement suggests that Christ's assumption of a body was real, but served the purpose of assuming our human nature in order to perfect it. He tends to undercut a serious incarnational theology by asserting that, while Jesus ate food, he did so just so his own disciples would not conclude that he was a phantasm. As for himself, Jesus felt no need for food, nor anything else; he was "inaccessible to any movement of feeling--either pleasure or pain."⁵¹ Jesus seems to make human nature perfect precisely in his rejection of need, passions, pain and death. His death, or rather apparent death, on the cross must have been out of completely altruistic motives--death was the vehicle by which Jesus was enabled to preach the gnosis of the Christian life to the dead. Clement is so overly concerned with the positive aspects of his doctrine, that he scarcely gives any attention at all to those who do not, or cannot become the true believer (gnostic). Yet, he does maintain that there will be suffering after death for those who do not begin their upward trek to God in this life. That

⁵¹Clement of Alexandria, Vol. II, VIII.ii.

suffering is, however, inflicted "through the goodness of the great judge" in order to drive the wicked away from their sinful lives and forward in progress to God. It is more the case that punishment is meant to help a man to make right decisions in relation to God, than to work off past sins or pay penalties for wrongdoing.

If like 'deaf adders' they will not listen to the song. . .let them (the wicked) be disciplined at the hand of God, enduring paternal correction before judgment, until they be ashamed and repent, and not incur the final condemnation.⁵²

Punishment, in Clement, is rightly understood as paternal correction.

In consonance with this idea, it is said that Christ descended to preach to the Jews and Greeks in Hades in order to free them for their proper pilgrimage to God. In fact, Clement ventures the guess that all men, dead or alive, indeed all creation will respond affirmatively to the Word of God as he makes himself known. He may hint at the "final Judgment," but his own prejudices mitigate against it.

Thus, I fancy, the goodness of God is proved, and the power of the Lord, to save with justice and equality displayed to those who turn to him, whether here (in this life) or elsewhere. For the energizing power does not come only on men here; it is operative in all places and at all times.⁵³

Should it be objected that this fact would undermine the concept of free will, Clement counters with the doctrine of the Power of God. The Logos himself is the power of God, he claims, and what sense is there in talking about power that is powerless?⁵⁴ The power of the Logos would

⁵²Ibid., Vol, II, VII.xvi.

⁵³Ibid., Vol. II, VI.vi.

⁵⁴Ibid.

be seriously hampered indeed should his earnest preaching be to no avail. But those who are in the underworld, who have died and yet who are not set on the upward journey toward God, know even more clearly than "men here," that is, than earthly men, what poor prospects are the alternatives to the power of the Logos. Surely, they must all sooner or later be persuaded by the Logos to turn to him in faith and in discipline.

Salvation is a thing for which the soul is intended and into which it immediately steps upon believing: ". . .salvation immediately attends on noble willing, willing and life being, one might say, yoke-fellows."⁵⁵

The result of saving gnosis, knowledge that proceeds from faith and issues in a disciplined, active life, is a kind of deification.

This knowledge leads (believers) to the end, the endless final end; teaching of the life that is to be ours, a life in conformity to God, with gods, when we have been freed from all punishment and correction, which we undergo as a result of our wrong-doings for our saving discipline. After thus being set free. . .they have received the title of 'gods', since they are destined to be enthroned with the other 'gods' who are ranked next below the Saviour.⁵⁶

In Clement, we confront Christian speculation on the things both before and after death. Yet, this speculation must not be allowed to obscure the central fact which makes Clement Christian, namely, that this earthly life must be taken seriously as a way to God. Clement's optimism seems to overshadow what Pelikan calls "pessimism about life" in the assertion that all persons will someday come to union with God.

⁵⁵ Henry Bettenson (ed. and trans.) The Early Christian Fathers (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 246.

⁵⁶ Clement of Alexandria, Vol. II, VII.x.

But this optimism is never construed in such a way that specific human response is made irrelevant. Clement's very weighty attention to how a Christian should conduct himself or herself in regard to what we should today call "etiquette" is evidence enough that his speculations about the afterlife had plenty of implications for this life. In this connection, Clement also emphasized the trust element--faith is more than intellectual commitment; it is, indeed, submitting in trust to the authority of the scriptures and their call to God prior to any intellectual investigation. So, for all his differences with Tatian, Clement is agreed on the necessity of earthly, bodied existence and a yielding to God as the appropriate response to life and death.

Cyprian⁵⁷

Cyprian is probably not a profound thinker on the matter of death. But his chief contribution would appear to be a new use of language. According to Pelikan, Cyprian was the first writer to use the Latin word, arcessitio, "summons," in reference to death. Death is God's call to the individual to present himself and to give an accounting of his life before the Supreme Judge. Pelikan claims that, "Far from mitigating the severity of death, as much symbolic language about dying does, this metaphor aggravates it by calling attention to the vertical dimension in the shape of death, the irresistible call of the Summoner."⁵⁸

⁵⁷Ibid., Vol. II, VII, xvi.

⁵⁸Pelikan, p. 69.

This vertical dimension is the element that seems to be missing so far in the development of the Christian thought about death. Tatian argued that beyond the grave, as before birth, man is limited and finite. These limits were placed upon man by a merciful God. There is yet hope for the believer that God may reconstitute him as a person in the resurrection. But as for his continuity beyond death, in an unbroken line of existence, i.e., immortality, there is nothing to be hoped. Thus Tatian deals with the limits of the horizontal. Clement of Alexandria, on the other hand, also deals with the horizontal dimension but in terms of extension both ways. Man is pre-existent--at least this is so in a minimal sense for the elect, and must be so potentially for all men; man is also immortal, as the Greeks knew, in that he continues on his road to perfection at death.

Cyprian seems less concerned with the problem of continuity or discontinuity. He is not a profound thinker regarding either immortality or resurrection, and seems to have a rather confused, non-systematic approach to the problem of what happens at death, or how the Christian hope is to be conceived in particular terms. Yet, one thing is certain; death does mean that the individual lives in each moment before God bearing the awful responsibility of his life before the Creator. Death charges the moment, the vertical dimension, with great meaning. It is the place where the Christian's true faith, his readiness to trust his Lord, is tested. There is no real waiting period.

But we who live in hope and believe in God and have faith that Christ suffered for us and rose again, abiding in Christ and rising again through him and in him, why are we ourselves either unwilling

to depart hence from this world, or why do we mourn and grieve for our departing ones as if they are lost?⁵⁹

The weight of his comment is that we are abiding in Christ, and we are rising again through him and in him. Thus, all things are cared for in the moment. I am called to account for my faith now, and my accounting is seen most clearly in my willingness, my readiness for the summons, or my willingness to yield others to the same summons.

Cyprian believes that the best definition of death is this: it is "to be changed and reformed to the image of Christ and to the dignity of the heavenly grace."⁶⁰ In whatever relationship the dead and risen Christ stands with respect to the present world, that is the same relationship the believing Christian will assume in death. The precise shape of this relationship awaits its final revelations for each of us, yet that relationship is already defined. Thus, in the De Mortalitate. Cyprian may speak of "victory" in the face of mortality, a crown as the reward for the faithful in the struggle of life and death. Here again, however, the victory and the struggle are present realities. The De Mortalitate was written in the midst of an outbreak of plague. In this circumstance, Christians and their loved ones were dying daily. The threat of death hung heavily over all. In speaking of struggle and victory, Cyprian is not constructing a theory of rewards and punishments, a systematic description of life after death. He is calling his people to courage in the face of disaster. This courage will be the

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 71.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 70.

product not of quiet contemplation, but of affirmative living in the midst of the negation of life. The vertical dimension is again brought to bear clearly. Cyprian reiterates what is a common idea in Tatian and others of the early fathers: death is an act of mercy in that it limits man's sinfulness and ability to exercise his sinful nature infinitely. Death is a form of deliverance, in which God acts to deliver man. Thus, as Pelikan observes, "Mortality belongs to the ways that the God of promise uses to carry out his plans for men. Faith in him means trust that death, too, has its place in his design."⁶¹

Origen⁶²

As we come to Origen, we come upon a system of profound and complicated dimensions. It would be impossible to give a full account of his thought here, yet something of Origen's impact on Christian thinking concerning death must be elucidated.

Origen's chief contribution to the discussion of death appears to be his systematization of theological questions on the basis of scriptural exegesis. As a Christian, Origen was more dependent on the Scriptures than was his teacher, Clement.⁶³ Yet, Origen was also the more creative philosopher and critical thinker. While Origen was able to enumerate the various doctrines of faith (and here "faith" indeed means

⁶¹Ibid., p. 64.

⁶²Origen, "De Principiis," in Robertson and Donaldson, II.

⁶³Pelikan, p. 91.

attention to the correct doctrines, viz., there is one God who is Father, and one only-begotten Son, co-eternal with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and Son, etc.), he was also able to draw distinctions between what the Church teaches and what is open territory, free to be explored by means of new concepts, new language, "investigations."⁶⁴

Indeed, Origen seems to be more self-conscious than other early writers that this freedom to explore is both acceptable and fruitful as a means to doing theology. Scholars have debated whether this exploratory detachment is really from Origen or from his editor, Rufinus; the latter was concerned to keep Origen's works "in print" by freely editing the objectionable portions of what he had written. Yet Tillich observes that the "simple ones", i.e., the simpler minded theologians of the time, for example Methodius, "revolted" against Origen because they wanted to tie the Christian proclamation to the realistic conditions which obtain between men. In short, they were intimidated by Origen's freedom of thought, and wanted a more literal, better defined approach.⁶⁵ This would seem to suggest that much of Origen's free-thinking is original to him.

If we turn to see what this free-thinker produced, we should turn to the second book of the De Principiis. Here are contained all the great themes with which we are concerned and all the themes which

⁶⁴Origen, Vol. II, II.viii.4.

⁶⁵Tillich, p. 64.

eventually got Origen into trouble. Here, we will work backward, in order to grasp the essence of Origen's reflections.

If we ask, "What is real life?", Origen answers two things: it is life hid with Christ in God; it is also eternal life.⁶⁶ Life is characterized by dynamic change, "motion and volition."⁶⁷ Now, in this circumstance, we see people who live very different kinds of lives. Some center on the bodily pleasures. Some have a more elevated goal, for example, service in the community. A few seek even the higher goals of inner purity and wisdom. In each case, life is still "eternal," but the differences between particular expressions of the "eternal" are to be accounted for by the individuals themselves. Those who live for the body have "forgotten themselves,"⁶⁸ that is, where they have come from and what they are about. They live at the level of the superficial, the mundane, the everyday. They cannot perceive the deeper meanings of life, because they do not "will" so to perceive. Those persons who act for the common good have at least seen through some of the superficiality of the bodily and have begun an upward trek to the world of the higher concerns. Those in the third category are the ones who have opened themselves up to the very Wisdom of God himself. Now,

⁶⁶Origen, Vol. II, II.xi.1.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., II.xi.2.

existence in this world of the body is meant to train us for real life.⁶⁹

Now, if we ask further, "How does one open himself up to 'real life'?", Origen answers that it is through being attentive to the world which God has made, the world which is our training ground. Every created thing, like every work an artist produces, excites an interest in the original plan or design, and this excitement leads us into questions of purpose. So it is with the world we live in. To the attentive mind, there occurs a dialogue in the world between the things one perceives and the purpose behind them. This dialogue is intended by God himself. This being the case, the material things we encounter are not only not evil in themselves, as some contend; they are very important to our training in spirituality. Now, since only a limited encounter can be expected in this earthly existence, no matter how significant or deep, another life is required in order to "gratify" our inborn curiosity.⁷⁰

It is important, I think, carefully to note what Origen has said here. An existence beyond the grave is necessary, not only on ethical grounds--as a reward or punishment--and certainly not as a possession of the soul. Indeed, for Origen soul is a word which designates something negative in itself, namely a cooling of spirit. Because it is cool in relation to the spirit which spawned it, the soul is always in danger of

⁶⁹Ibid., II.xi.3.

⁷⁰Ibid., II.xi.4.

being snuffed out.⁷¹ Existence beyond death is not, here, a way of devaluing the present life, but to the contrary, is called for because of a high valuation on what transpires on earth. It is necessary in order for man to fulfill himself, to fulfill what it is God intends for him and created within him. It would appear that one denies this world only at the risk of denying himself, since it is through this world that man must come to himself. Of course, it is also possible for man to become fixed at this level, and that is an undesirable thing. Yet, it is undesirable because, in that case, he would be stunted in his growth. So Origen's thought leads to a positive evaluation of earthly life precisely in his affirming an existence beyond the grave.

This is confirmed when we look at what it is which will characterize the mature man's existence after death: he will become intimately and immediately related to and knowledgeable of the "Divine providence on each individual thing."⁷² He assures us this is to be taken both figuratively and literally.

Origen's positive evaluation of the present life extends to the body. The bodies we have are not accidents, even less are they evil in themselves. To the "heretics", Origen challenges them to explain those passages of the scripture which refer to the resurrection of the body. A body has shape; no one can conceive of a shapeless body. If this is so, then body as shape and substance is in some sense important to our

⁷¹Ibid., II.viii.3.

⁷²Ibid., II.xi.5.

existence beyond the grave, just as it is now. The importance of this argument is to be found between the lines: though tacit, it is nevertheless clear that the body is a positive thing. Now, of course, it is possible to over-value the body, so Origen also turns to the Christians who rather simple-mindedly cling to the notion that the "heavenly" body will be "entangled with the passions of flesh and blood."⁷³

What is wrong with our present bodies is that they are subject to corruption, dissolution. The bodies which we will receive in the future resurrection will be incorruptible, indissoluble, and perfectly suited to their new occupations.

Because Origen was a Greek philosopher as well as a Christian theologian, it was natural that he should also teach the pre-existence of souls. But, whereas this doctrine usually has the force of pronouncing judgment on this life, lock, stock and barrel, the same is not true for Origen. To be sure, in the beginning, God created everything perfect and all things equal. Today we see diversity and suffering due to injustice. This state of affairs was produced by the free will of those things which God originally created. Thus, Origen speaks of a "fall." Spirits fell away from Spirit, becoming souls. This world (cosmos-universe) was arranged by God, but in consequence of these free decisions against Him. But God, not to be outdone or undone, turns even this situation to good account. He orders the "superior" spirits to

⁷³Ibid., II.x.3.

help the "inferior": He subjects them in hope, namely, the hope of those who have no hope. The point is the redemption of that which is lost. In fact, Origen, in speaking of this "order" also hints at a curious option, namely, the "endurance of the Creator."⁷⁴ What he seems to be getting at is even that God Himself suffers in an active way for the sake of his creatures who have fallen, in their own free wills, so far from him.

What does this mean but that the world of the material is a sign of God's grace, His refusal to let any rebellion have final sway over His divine purposes? God, indeed, "provides for all men, and encourages all to the use of whatever remedies may lead to their cure, and he incites them to salvation."⁷⁵ God is the author of the saving possibility.⁷⁶ This material world may be the place where spirit "cooled" to souls comes closest to being snuffed out. But, it is also the place where God's greatest creativity, His saving power and His efforts to train men for spiritual life, are most evident.

Origen has a great deal of confidence in God's eventual triumph. His concept of the ἀποκαταστάσις των παντων is well known.⁷⁷ Even the punishments of hell are meant to instruct. Because the body in the

⁷⁴Ibid., II.ix.7.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Term suggested by William K. McElvaney.

⁷⁷Tillich, p. 64.

resurrection is incorruptible, and there is in the scripture no distinction between the body of the righteous and that of the sinner, there can only be one conclusion: the bodies of all will continue to be led along the path that leads eventually to union with God. Thus, Origen has an absolute confidence in God's future, in his ability to overcome the diversity and dissension within the creation.

On the other hand, Origen also calls for a full and active commitment of the Christian on this earthly plane, for it is through his sufferings and even death that one comes to a full possession of himself. This is God's plan and intention. Yielding to it is the mark of the mature thinker.

Irenaeus⁷⁸

Irenaeus is not a systematic thinker. His doctrines are developed in polemic against the excesses of the "heretics," primarily the gnostics. It is this working out of the themes of the faith over against the backdrop of a mighty challenge to faith that offers the reader some degree of excitement and insight, even if the effect is sometimes repetitive and confusing.

The end, or goal of life is the perfect integration of the elements which make man, man: body, soul and spirit. Perfection can be defined as this integration, which is modelled on the "Son of Man,"

⁷⁸Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," in Robertson and Donaldson, I.

Jesus Christ, the divine Logos.⁷⁹ Imperfection consists in giving undue attention to any one element over against the others.⁸⁰

Christ effects this integration through his own "recapitulation" of God's "handiwork". These two terms figure very prominently in Irenaeus' thought. While the precise description for how this happens is lacking in Irenaeus, in fact cannot be given by him because it is known only to God;⁸¹ nevertheless, what can be said is so strikingly different from the Gnostic schools as to demand some specifics.

Recapitulation means that the "curve of the incarnation. . . repeats the pattern of the creation."⁸² It was man, who had become lost, that Jesus came to find. "The Lord. . . therefore did not become some other formation," but took on a personal history, complete with body, and entered actually and fully upon the human scene. So, recapitulation means bringing man's fullness back into its proper balance in relation to God's purposes.

God's handiwork is the material with which creation has been endowed. In the first place, it is not possible to reject this world as material without also showing bad faith toward God, the creator of all.⁸³ But the material world has a positive good about it, namely, that it

⁷⁹Ibid., V.vi.1.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid., II.xxviii.7.

⁸²Pelikan, p. 110.

⁸³Irenaeus, Vol. I, II.xxxiv.3.

serves to keep us centered upon God, the source of all. The end of man is to appreciate God's sheer goodness.⁸⁴ This was man's end even in the garden, before the fall. Man chose to follow after the "colour of immortality", a chimerical pursuit to be sure. He wanted to be like God, but for finite man this was never a possibility.⁸⁵ In the garden man did just what he has always done, given emphasis to one side of himself rather than seeking that full integration which God seeks, and which is called salvation. It is the same mistake the Gnostics continually make, only in a different form.

Now the matter is even more urgent, post-paradise. The way toward full integration is through man's acceptance of where he stands before God. This is what Jesus did, and we are without excuse having his example before us. Irenaeus shares with his contemporaries the notion that physical existence which carries with it death and suffering is a good thing in that it enables God to set a limit on our sinfulness. Yet, this is far too pessimistic for Irenaeus. More must be said. Suffering and death confront us with the real possibility of achieving personhood. The apostles are those who freely chose the hard route, the way of suffering because in it they realized that God's strength is made perfect. Here they came closest to God. Jesus freely chose death, because he realized that man's pursuit of immortality, his emphasis on

⁸⁴Ibid., III.xx.2.

⁸⁵Ibid., III.xxiii.1.

the spiritual to the neglect of this life, could only be overcome in this way. Jesus had to die in order to introduce man to life. But this life is not just "endless ages." It is full life, fully in the present.

The question is, why is the pursuit of the spiritual really destructive? And why is the way of suffering and death really constructive? The first is relatively easy to answer. In pursuing the spiritual, Irenaeus' Gnostic opponents really lose any sense of urgency for the present, for their individual acts. Oh, they speak of faith and righteousness all right. But their system calls for the continued life of the soul only because it is soul--and they place the soul over against the life of the body. There is a permanent dichotomy between the two. And just as the material dissolves and decays, so ultimately it must have no real part in life. But because the soul is so utterly different, it must have a permanent part in life. Therefore, on the basis of the principle that "like shall be gathered to like", the Gnostics have concluded that the soul, all souls, will take an immortal existence simply because they are souls. But what has this to do with an individual's "acts of righteousness?" What has this to do with faith? If all souls wind up in the same place because they are souls, and because they attract one another, then there is really no such thing as "judgment" and therefore, no need for righteousness or faith. The present moment has lost all its urgency. Irenaeus sought to return a sense of urgency to the present.

But why is the way of bodily suffering and death really constructive? The soul possesses the body; it is not the other way around. The soul stands in relation to the body as the artist's intention stands

in relation to his tools, his medium. The latter impedes the former, just as the body impedes the soul. Yet, the soul's purpose is to share with the body the glory which it alone beholds. The soul receives life from God, so that it may share life with the body. By turning away from life in the body, man shows his unworthiness to both the soul and to God. The body is where man shows his thankfulness for whatever life he may obtain. Though the soul has a "velocity," a vitality of its own from God, this vitality would be meaningless without expression. So the body is the place where this expression comes out. Though it slows the soul down in the course of this expression, it is, nevertheless, absolutely necessary to it. Furthermore, whatever flaws the body may have, vis-a-vis suffering and mortality, it is like any other medium, for each medium has its own peculiar limitations. Yet, again, these limitations cannot be avoided because the medium itself is necessary to the soul's expression. Finally, whatever life is thankfully received by the body from the soul, however that particular expression is formed will determine what kind of "habitation," position or status the soul will receive from God after the judgment. Integration of the whole man is what God intends; this will take place after judgment in terms of what the embodied soul did on earth. So there is really a reciprocating relationship between body and soul precisely in the experience and reaction to suffering and death which determines how full, how complete a person will be with respect to eternity. If one, body or soul, turns away from the other, the whole man is stunted in his growth toward God.

We catch the thrust of Irenaeus' thought then relating to death as we see that a man, in order to receive that full life which God

promises in the future, must trustingly and thankfully accept what life brings his way here. To place the stress of one's actions and thought either on the body or on the soul is to risk having all taken away. Irenaeus is optimistic, confident in God's intentions and power, but calls his people to a commitment for life here and now.

Conclusion

From our study of the Early Fathers we find these things to be instructive to our understanding of the New Testament kerygma in relation to death and dying:

1. Variety: The earliest theological reflections on death in the Christian Church were quite diverse. Far from working out one monolithic system, as is popularly assumed, the early fathers felt free to make use of the New Testament materials in a most creative and variegated manner. They were not, of course, attempting to be creative in some ivory tower removed from real life. For the most part, their insights and ideas were the product of an active, demanding, and often painful exchange with the world of living experience. What is instructive for us, however, is that they found the New Testament proclamation to give rise to profound hope in various situations and in various forms. We may conclude that hope cannot be contained in one formulation or understanding today any more adequately than it was then. Christian faith means coming to understand and articulate hope in the face of death precisely in terms which fit the experience of specific persons and times, as diverse as they may be.

2. Unity: the cross of Christ, his suffering and death make death and the concreteness of life central to the understanding of Christian hope. The fathers do not postulate the existence of life after death as of interest for its own sake. Even the most speculative writers, Origen and Clement, possibly Irenaeus, show little concern in dealing with the after-life as such, but raise their speculations for two reasons: (1) to counter the gnostic teachings, and (2) to show the relationship of embodied life to God's purposes. It is probably unthinkable that the early fathers could have written without reference to speculative notions. What is important to notice is how they handle these notions in relation to their overall concerns. We believe that for all their variety of views, the thrust of their arguments comes to rest on the present life with all its limitations, pains, and death. They did not seek ways to escape death. They did not deny death as such. They affirmed death as integral, in fact, to God's overall plan. We believe they arrived at this "unity" of their message by starting where the scriptures start, with a God who works in history, with His Christ who embraces in himself suffering and death. To accept death as a part of God's overall plan, as His provision for man in one way or another, is to be freed to live in whatever moment and circumstance one finds himself. Yielding oneself to God in trust in the concrete moments of one's life and death means hope and dignity are real possibilities for a person for the first time.

3. Thrust. If indeed the Fathers start with a New Testament faith, and they come to direct their ideas to the acceptance and conduct

of concrete life before God in trust, then we believe this constitutes a reliable index to the New Testament's self-understanding. Had the New Testament spoken with clarity on the nature of life after death, for example, and its real kerygmatic intent was to inform us as to what this life was like, then we should be surprised to find that the Fathers in interpreting the New Testament faith came back down to earth. What we find is that the fathers diversify the scriptural idea concerning the after-life, but with a view to affirming this life. This indicates to us that the New Testament itself is more concerned to affirm this life and its acceptance in its concreteness, including death, than to point to a world beyond with real interest. We must here emphasize that it is the direction of thought, the thrust of the kerygma, which is important. The New Testament does speak about an after-life, some dimension beyond death. But it is one thing to affirm this fact and another to conclude from it that the New Testament's primary concern is to lead a person to this life beyond the grave. It seems to us, based on the same type of thing in the Early Fathers, that the New Testament begins with a confidence in God's future, whatever that future may contain, and moves to affirm in the light of this the essential goodness of this concrete, earthly life with all its joys and sorrows, frustrations, pains and death. Only when this thrust is made clear, can the New Testament's words concerning death be adequately understood.

WORD STUDIES

Finally, we shall turn to investigate the primary words which are necessary as background to the exegesis of texts concerning the Christian understanding of death. These words were chosen on the criterion of centrality to the Christian proclamation: Zoe, Bios, Thanatos, Aion, Anistemi. Two words were chosen because they carry widely differing connotations in the contemporary mind and must be seen in contrast to the dominant thrust in the five words just cited: aphtharsia, athanasia.

Our primary source for these word-studies was the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. In addition, we also used The Expository Dictionary of the New Testament Words, by W. E. Vine; Thayers's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; and Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible.

The comprehensive study of these key words could easily be the subject of an entire dissertation. We have desired to point out those features of the words which we believe are necessary to contemporary preaching.

ζωή and βίος ⁸⁶

In the classical Greek usage, ζωή was the more comprehensive term, βίος the more limited. ζωή could refer either to natural life,

⁸⁶Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (eds.), Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), Vol. II, pp. 832-75.

life characterized as κίνησις or movement; all plants, animals and men shared ζωή in this sense. Or it could refer to that highest achievement in human life, participation in the νοῦς or θεωρία. This second type of life has to do with the essence of man as such, rather than his mere existence. ζωή was not understood as an unfolding of life, a natural process so to speak in this second sense. Instead, it was conceived in rather general, supratemporal terms, and would come down into a man. Man does not actualize himself as such, but fulfills what is general in his particular life. Thus, a man's life is not viewed as unique and unrepeatable. Man does not have ζωή just by being a living being. He must reach up for it. Needless to say, ζωή conceived in this fashion is eternal, without temporal dimensions, and thoroughly otherworldly because it is ideal.⁸⁷

βίος in the classical Greek refers to individual human life, its element of duration, and the style or manner of life. It can thus also refer to a man's calling, vocation, livelihood. It is possible to speak of living life, βίον ζῆν.⁸⁸

The Stoics conceived of ζωή also in terms of movement, κίνησις. But life did not unfold itself here, either. It subsisted on the cosmic force understood as spirit, πνεῦμα.⁸⁹ The intelligence

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 832-37.

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 838-39.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 862.

of man helped to achieve ζωή through detachment and contemplation. Again, ζωή is supratemporal.⁹⁰

The Neo-Platonists represent a significant further development of the concept ζωή. ζωή and ψυχή, soul, both derive or emanate from νοῦς, understanding. Both ψυχή and ζωή are strangers to the αἶμα. They belong to a higher realm than that of the material. However, both are still very low on the total ladder of being. The highest, the ἕν, the One, who is at the top of the ladder does not have ζωή at all. The ἕν is the source from which ζωή finally emerges. True life is available as man's potential. It is a task for man. It is gained through contemplation. When a man is successful at the task, he is οὐσία και νοῦς και ζῶον παντελές, that is, he does not merely have life, he is life--he moves onto another plane of being. True life, ἀληθινὴ ζωή, belongs to the other world. It can no longer, as with the Greeks, be accomplished in the "historicity of human existence."⁹¹

Gnosticism appears to have lost its connections with Greek thought altogether in its description of ζωή. ζωή is no longer vitality, κίνησις. It is entirely descriptive of the divine realm. Here, the Gnostic dualism comes clearly into view. ζωή is indestructible duration", and the "underlying force which triumphs over all obstacles".⁹² ζωή is conceived in rather primitive terms as a divine fluid which is brought into the initiate by the πνεῦμα, not borne by the ψυχή. "In

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 837.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 838-39.

⁹²Ibid., p. 839.

Gnostic dualism life is regarded as an absolutely otherworldly divine power or as the ἀφθαρσία established by it, so that this ζωή cannot be received in the earthly world and its apparent life.⁹³ What ζωή does is to remove the individual from the realm of death in the mysteries. Here, the initiate distances himself from the life of body through negation and separation. The body does whatever it wishes, because the life of the initiate is freed from it, including its death. "Freedom from death really means freedom from the specific possibilities of human existence."⁹⁴ The gnostic does not look for ζωή to change or impinge on his somatic existence in any way. For him, this world truly is not his home. This view understandably presents a very clear alternative and danger to the heritage of the OT faith which informs Christianity. We shall have to hold its notions in strictest tension with NT usage of this critical term, ζωή.⁹⁵

The Septuagint translated the Hebrew חַיִּים with ζωή.⁹⁶ βίος is found only once, at Proverbs 31.12. Bertram observes that the LXX maintains the Greek distinction of the ζωή as vita qua vivimus, the life as we live it; and βίος as vita quam vivimus, the life that we live.⁹⁷ So, the LXX understood the Old Testament tradition to be in accord with

⁹³Ibid., p. 841.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 842.

⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 839-42.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 851.

⁹⁷Ibid.

the Greek notion that $\zeta\omega\eta$ is normative, $\beta\acute{\iota}\omicron\varsigma$ is the normal.

G. von Rad informs us that the Hebrew חַיִּים indicates "only physical, organic life."⁹⁸ This life is decidedly a good in itself, and so mere length of days is called a grace of God. Sickness and death do not in any sense belong to life. Death did not come with the fall of man, for example, but only bitter life according to J, the oldest stratum of the OT tradition.⁹⁹ When P interweaves the story about the tree of life, he is only bowing in the direction of ancient near eastern mythic stories. Yet, even this representation of the quest for immortality as the root of sin is not entirely successful. The distinctive understanding of the Old Testament is that life is a gift, and that it is completely dependent on God. Even natural life is so understood, and, for this reason, it cannot be taken for granted. One must always seek a blessing for life. One's life is utterly dependent on the word of God, that is, on obedience and fulfillment of his commandments, his covenant relationship. Disobedience or even lack of attention to God's word leads to death. God is exclusively the God of the living; the dead are excluded from praising Him, and so death is always an awful event. It is met with resignation only.¹⁰⁰ If the OT speaks on occasion of an abiding with God (as for example in the Psalms) or a being taken up into Him, it does so primarily from the point of view of theodicy. It is

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 843.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 844.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 846-47.

grounded in God's grace alone, and not in any conception or speculation concerning immortality. "This expectation (of a conquest of death) is neither magical nor mythical nor speculative nor mystical."¹⁰¹

R. Bultmann augments von Rad's view in maintaining that the more adequate interpretation of חַיָּה in Hebrew terms is nephesh. The term kol-nephesh means, for example, everything that lives. This life is essence seen in concrete expressions of life: emotions, desires, wishes. It has little to do with the intellectual capacity. So nephesh is interchangeable with bashar, flesh. Nephesh is transcendent, a gift from God. Yet, life is still my life, that is, the individual is responsible for himself in relation to God. Life is not a manner of living, as is βίος in the Greek. It can never be described adverbially, living happily or unhappily. Life is happy or unhappy depending on how one responds to God's word. God is the one who has life and gives life in His word.¹⁰²

The Greek notion that χρῆμα is supratemporal led along a path to the Gnostics and their view that it was totally otherworldly. The Hebrew notion that life is a gift from a transcendent God led in the direction of emphasis on the concrete human response to it. Thus Palestinian Judaism is able to take life into an eternal dimension without giving up a sense of urgency for life that it inherited from the OT. The eternal dimension of life shows up in Palestinian Judaism after

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 848.

¹⁰²Ibid., pp. 849-51.

the Maccabees in terms of resurrection.¹⁰³ This resurrection was thought of as necessary in view of the "greater concentration on individual life", specifically in the form of persecutions and martyrdoms. "The more death becomes a burden that makes life vain. . .the stronger the sense that real life demands the prolongation of life."¹⁰⁴ This prolongation was not, however, grounded in the soul, but, again, in the grace of God. This new emphasis on life beyond the grave does not allow much speculation either. It is said that this eschatological life will not have any suffering or be restricted; yet, this is only because the OT does not see these things as proper to life as such anyway. The notion of resurrection raised more questions than it solved, and in some instances it takes on the nature of a purely academic debate (as for example between Sadducees and Pharisees).

Hellenistic Judaism remains true to its OT roots in its insistence that life is from God. Yet, it is beginning to take on many Greek ideas as its own. It can begin, for example, to qualify life in terms of adverbial phrases, to describe it as a manner of life. It also assumes a life after death, and tends to replace the notion of resurrection with ideas about immortality. Philo, in fact, is almost indistinguishable from the Greeks in his thought. Hellenistic Judaism does make room for a novel emphasis in the notion that "death may be an act" of the individual.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 855.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 856.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 858-60.

The New Testament can understand life both in terms of something natural and as that which is man's true calling, his fulfillment. Natural life is understood more in OT terms rather than classical Greek terms: life is given by God's spirit, but it is something over which the individual has control, or better, for which he is responsible. Life is not a force that resides above and comes down into man; it is a gift. The NT does not develop the Greek notion of βίος, that is, it pays little attention to this term as having distinctive possibilities.¹⁰⁶ It may use βίος in reference to life's duration (Lk. 8.14; 2 Tim. 6.5); in reference to a manner of life (1 Tim. 2.2; 1 Jn. 2.16--here "pride of life" refers to a narrow, self-centered existence); or in reference to the means of life, livelihood, vocation (Mk 12.44; 1 Jn. 3.17--"goods").

The New Testament does develop the term ζωή. ζωή does not take on "its meaningful content in βίος" because man cannot live for himself--that leads to death.¹⁰⁷ A man lives for and in God, the source of ζωή. This ζωή is true (in that just mere life, ἐν σαρκί, is provisional). It is future, lies out ahead of the individual. It is indestructible, unlimited, bountiful. Yet, NT ζωή is not generalized as is the classical notion. It must be fulfilled in concrete response (Jn. 12.25, a call to response, to serve; Mt. 19.16 par., the necessity of action; 1 Tim. 6.12, "take hold of ζωή αἰών"). It is the goal of a

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 861.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 863.

whole pattern of life, a goal at least partially realizable in the moment (Ro. 2.7, 6.22, 5.21; Luke 10, the parable of the Good Samaritan). And, most typically, it is grounded, not in ideas or the other world or the soul, but in the living, dying, rising Christ (Jn. 11.25; Ro. 6.10; Ac.3.15; 2 Tim. 1.10; Ro. 5.10). It is this emphasis that Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection--all past events--is the $\alpha\chi\eta\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ τῆς ζωῆς, the author of life, which poses a certain problem for interpreting ζωῆ (and ζωῆ αἰών, eternal life, in particular), as a completely future event or gift. As Bultmann observes, there is something about this ζωῆ that we still hope for (insofar as it is indestructible, etc.), but there is also something about it which makes it a present possession.¹⁰⁸ If the synoptics look forward entirely to ζωῆ, it is only because the resurrection in the narrative is not yet accomplished. The epistles, on the other hand, regard the resurrection and its gifts as, in part, a fait accompli.¹⁰⁹ While this tension between present possession and future fulfillment cannot be easily resolved, nevertheless, it is important to hold what we have said about the NT understanding of life in sharp contrast to gnostic and Greek teachings as a whole.

The Christian understanding of life makes it not only necessary but mandatory to take seriously one's own historicity. This means

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 865.

¹⁰⁹Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), Vol. I, p. 347.

nothing less than embracing suffering and death as a part of life, just as Christ did (Phil. 2.4-10; Hb. 5.8; 2 Cor. 8.9). This means that every act is potentially a maker or breaker of life. This means that action is central to life, and that even death can be seen as act. This means, finally, that life must not be seen only in its otherworldly aspects, but precisely and primarily in its full presence. Whatever one does with life in this moment determines its orientation toward the future, however that is understood, in the next moment, next year, or "eternity". One cannot play down "this life" in favor of some generalized notion about Life, nor is one permitted to create a complete dichotomy between the life of the σῶμα and that of the πνεῦμα. Life now is, by God's grace, life in its fullest sense if accepted in faithful response. This is the Christian message and the ground of Christian hope.

θάνατος¹¹⁰

In classical Greek, death is understood as the cessation of life. Beginning at least with Homer, however, death moves away from mere cessation, a natural phenomenon, to an act with specific consequences. To die well is what brings the warrior in battle his glory (κλέος, δόξα), and the philosopher his ἀρετή. In the case of the warrior, his reputation lives on in the community. In the case of the philosopher, his true life (ζωή) is reached and his ψυχή is freed to its

¹¹⁰Kittel, Vol. III, pp. 7-25.

full communion with $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ from which it was barred while imprisoned within the body, $\sigma\acute{\omega}\mu\alpha$. Death is separation of what is vital in reality from what is bound to decay. Therefore, death need not be feared. While Plato has no absolute assurance that the soul will gain immortality, there is great hope. In any case, death does not really impinge upon $\zeta\omega\eta$, for the latter is supratemporal. Death can be seen as a test for the righteous man, however, in that its very presence helps a man to come to his own fulfillment, it boosts him, so to speak, into that higher realm for which he should have been preparing.

Death in the NT is conceived quite differently. Death is a terrible thing in the sense that it is an enemy (1 Cor. 15.26) and in the sense that its powers (e.g., $\phi\acute{o}\beta\omicron\varsigma$) are felt in this life and threaten or limit it. Death is the consequence of sin, a punishment for disobedience or unrighteousness. The curse of death is $\phi\theta\omicron\rho\acute{\alpha}$ (ruin, corruptibility) and $\acute{\alpha}\pi\omega\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha$ (waste, destruction).

Death is also overcome, from the NT viewpoint. This does not mean that the Christian will not die physically at some point. It does mean that death has lost its sting, that it has been conquered, that it is not final. Death is overcome in a particular death, that of Christ. It is not clear exactly how this is conceived; it is described in a number of different ways. What is dominant is that the believing Christian embraces death as he is initiated into the faith. It can be said of the Christian that he dies to the Lord (R. 14.7). The individual believer is called to imitate Christ. The participation in the Lord's Supper is participating in Christ's life and death. There is a different thrust here than in the classical Greek idea, namely, in the

outcome of this embrace of death (and suffering). There is nothing heroic about a Christian death as such; the defiance of death is not what brings life. Life is something the Christian can already experience because in some sense he is dead already. Yet, death is taken seriously by the Christian believer. Death is not separation, as for the Greeks. Nor is it a getting kicked into eternal action, so to speak. Death is an act for the Christian as much as it is for the Greek, but it is an act of acceptance rather than separation: the Christian accepts his place before God, plays out his role as creature, confesses that he is mortal (the sense of Paul's "this mortal must put on immortality" is that the Christian apprehends precisely the mortality that will "be further clothed" I Cor. 15.53; 2 Cor. 5.4); the Greek will have none of this, his true life being a matter really separate from mortal existence as such. Now if we ask how this act is carried out in its detail, the NT does not give us much to go on. In faith, (surrender, trust) the Christian clings to the death of Christ. The essential part of acceptance in terms of faith is trust. The outcome of the act is also vague. Death is described as a sleep. Some time lapse is implied between death and the resurrection. The nature of the resurrection body is not known. What can be known about death is its destructiveness, fully disclosed in this life; and its conquest in the Christ which makes death and suffering both experiences through which the resurrection power can be seen and felt also in this life.

This word does not admit of easy interpretation. Even in the classical Greek, it was taken to represent both the specific age or time of a thing (Heraclitus, Aristotle), and the endlessness of eternity of which this earthly, specific time (χρόνος) was a mere shadow or image.

The NT uses αἰών in the plural in a specifically religious manner, primarily in doxological formulations (Mt. 6.13; Lk. 1.33; Ro. 1.25, etc.). It is also used in formulae like εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος (Hb. 1.8), "forever and ever". Such terms usually have in mind eternity as timelessness. God is described as eternal, as one who in the first place was from long ages past, and in the second who is above time altogether. God alone is eternal, though the word can be used on occasion to mean simply persons of old time (τῶν ἀγίων ἀπ' αἰῶνος αὐτοῦ προφητῶν, Ac. 3.21). Curiously, however, the word can come to mean the fixed time of something, for example, the world. And Paul can refer to a future age, an age that is to come, or speak of this age as though it will be followed by another (e.g., I Cor. 2.6). It can be seen from this that αἰών is inexact inasmuch as it can both refer to the timelessness of God, and the strictly limited time of e.g., the world.

What emerges, we believe from this word, is not a definition but a feeling. αἰών refers both to a sense of boundlessness, limitlessness; and to what is appropriate to a thing, to "real life", for example. It

¹¹¹Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 197-209.

undoubtedly carries with it a sense of future, but also of essence: ζῶν αἰών is not simply that life for which there is no end, but that life which, by its very depth, is real life.

ἀνίστημι¹¹²

This word means, to rise up, resurrection. The Greek usage does not substantially differ from the Biblical usage of this word-group. The Greeks could use the verb in its transitive sense, to actually get up or to raise someone else up. In an intransitive sense, it could mean simply to waken from sleep, or to get up to speak.

Oepke gives us two types of Greek usage which have bearing on our understanding of the terms: (1) Resurrection is spoken of as impossible, to be replaced by the term for the transmigration of souls; (2) Resurrection is spoken of as a miraculous event which occurs from time to time but is not in any sense to be expected.¹¹³ The Greeks cannot and do not talk about a general resurrection. (Oepke believes the reaction the Athenians give Paul in the episode recorded in Acts indicates that they thought this word, ἀνίστασθαι, was a person, not an event!)¹¹⁴

The OT can refer to individual resurrections early, but these are exceptions grounded in God's grace. With time, however, a resurrection faith began to develop largely, as we have seen, out of a need for

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 368-72.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 369.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

God's vindication. In apocalyptic, this resurrection develops into a two-fold expectation, the resurrection of the righteous, and the resurrection of judgment.¹¹⁵ The terms of resurrection are still very fluid by the time of the development of the NT.

The NT can speak of specific acts performed by Jesus (e.g., John 11), or of Jesus' own resurrection. Jesus' Resurrection is the model for that which is to come, though, again, the situation is very vague with respect to the future. There is some indication that the Church anticipates a dual resurrection (Jn. 5.29; Lk. 14.14; Rev. 20.5).

The Resurrection of Jesus has an influence on our present lives (Ro. 6.5-8).¹¹⁶ What is future here is nevertheless ours, but by God's grace; its futurity prevents us from claiming the resurrection as an object of our possession, but does not allow us to escape the necessity of conforming in response to the Christ who is raised.¹¹⁷

ἀπορροια¹¹⁸

This word is derived from the root, φθείρω.

In General Greek usage, φθείρω meant to ruin, to decay, or in the middle voice, to perish.¹¹⁹ Anything that fell apart, decayed, crumbled

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 370.

¹¹⁶Bultmann, Vol. I, p. 347.

¹¹⁷Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 196f.

¹¹⁸Kittel, Vol. IX, pp. 93-106.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 93.

or withered away was ~~φθ~~ptos. Thus prisoners in jail on account of their debts describe themselves with this word; also buildings falling into disuse and disrepair are described this way.

The philosophical Greek usage placed this word group in tension with γίγνεσθαι, that which comes into being.¹²⁰ The philosophers looked for that which remained constant despite the flux of nature and its forms. The natural forms were those which emerged from being and fell into decay. That which remained constant must be above this rising and perishing movement.

Harder finds three uses typical in the New Testament: the real, the moral, and the ideal.¹²¹

The real use of ~~φθ~~ptos refers to what actually decays: thus ships (Rev. 8.9) and clothing (Lk. 12.33) are susceptible to destruction or ruin.

The moral sense includes understandings such as perversion, seduction and pollution (2 Cor. 11.3; Rev. 11.18b).

The ideal sense includes references to man's being in a corruptible state, so that man can be described as dying continually, that is, not once only (2 Cor. 4.16). ~~φθ~~ptos in this sense means more than decay; it refers to "eternal destruction" (Gal. 1.8). Corruptibility in this sense is eschatological, that is, will be disclosed in its full proportions at the judgment.¹²²

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 94.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 103.

¹²²Ibid., pp. 103-4.

It is in contrast to this sense, the ideal, that the word ἀφθαρσία must be seen. In the later Pauline corpus it comes to be used increasingly of God. God is absolutely ἀνάσσει. While this is completely the reverse for man (he is always φθάρτος), nevertheless, it is possible for man to be given incorruptibility as a gift from God.

Harder believes this gift is a completely future blessing, and he cites 1 Cor. 15, 42, 50, 53f, in support of this contention.¹²³ It is difficult to say, however, exactly how this futurity is to be understood. Harder himself admits that ἀφθαρσία is to be sought in this human life in some way, though it remains hidden.¹²⁴ But Paul's argument in the Corinthian letter leads up to a powerful conclusion calling for action: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (v. 58). The futurity of ἀφθαρσία seems to be emphasized by Paul for two reasons, (1) to show that it does not belong to man as such, but is a gift; and (2) to free man to work in every particular situation in which he finds himself. ἀφθαρσία would then have to be assured in some sense, and its benefits could not then be wholly relegated to the future. The blessings of ἀφθαρσία are indeed part of the ζωή, which the Christian enters upon here and now.

We should see ἀφθαρσία in not too narrow terms. The categories of real, moral and ideal senses is convenient, but ἀφθαρσία can and

¹²³Ibid., p. 105.

¹²⁴Ibid.

should be seen in contrast to all these senses: God is *aphthartos* because really and morally, as well as ideally, he is the opposite of what man in his self-centered, fallible and corruptible existence knows himself to be.

ἀθανασία¹²⁵

In Greek usage, this word is a literary term, according to Bultmann. Plato argues that it belongs to the soul, but there does not appear to be widespread belief in this doctrine. Hellenism takes the term over as a basic assumption of the soul. Though no corollary appears in the OT, nevertheless even Hellenistic Judaism adopts the term.

ἀθανασία is deathlessness. It is more, inasmuch as it implies participation in the divine, and even divinisation. The Stoics believed in an impersonal immortality because the person participates in the life-force of the cosmos. In Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism, immortality is sought through contemplation in the mysteries as well as through magic. Probably inherited from the Egyptian religions is the notion that there is even a food which grants immortality, the *φάρμακον ἀθανασίας* (or *αῶνς*).

¹²⁵Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 22-5.

The word ἀθάνατος does not occur in the NT at all, and the word ἀθανασία only in two passages--in Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15 and in 1 Tim. 6.16). ἀθανασία does not belong to the soul, or to man as such; it must be "put on." God alone is immortal. Bultmann says that the thought behind this usage in the NT is "not merely that of eternal duration but of a mode of existence different from that of σάρξ and αἷμα and equivalent to what is elsewhere called δόξα."¹²⁶

¹²⁶Ibid., pp. 24-5.

Chapter 3

THE HERMENEUTICAL MODELS

Introduction

In the last chapter, we drew a distinction between exegesis and hermeneutic. In this chapter, we shall examine several types of hermeneutical theory in order to discover how they may be of help to the preacher as he confronts the problem of death. Analogically speaking, exegesis stands to the text as the tools and techniques used to work a mine rich with ore. In this chapter, we shall regard hermeneutic as a blueprint, or model for transporting, refining and making use of the ore in the most valuable way. Modern hermeneutical theory, concerned as it is with explicating a theory of language and understanding, is well suited to this task.

Hermeneutic is concerned with understanding, interpreting and translating the text. In order to do this, hermeneutic must account for a general theory of what language does. Beyond this, it must show us how it regards the text. Finally, it must indicate the way in which it proposes to make the text available in its meaning for the contemporary hearer. This three-fold approach (1) a theory of language, (2) a concept of text, and (3) a method for translating (transposing) meaning, will provide the structure for our investigation.

We will direct our attention to the hermeneutical theories or models presented by Rudolf Bultmann; the "New Hermeneutic" represented

in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling; Paul Van Buren; and Erich Auerbach. Bultmann and the New Hermeneutic have obvious significance for any theological discussion and any contemporary biblical preacher. Paul Van Buren has been selected for his most recent suggestions on the nature of religious language, suggestions which we feel hold great promise for preaching on death. Erich Auerbach's work and its relevance for a Christian understanding of death was first indicated by Milton Gatch. In giving attention to him here, we show our concurrence with Gatch's opinions and our own concern to provide an additional hermeneutical model not based on the frankly linguistic approach characteristic of the theories represented above.

Rudolf Bultmann

In Bultmann, language is an objectification of self-understanding.¹ Thus, mythical language projects out into the external world the unknown forces and powers which are determinative of a man's life, on which man is dependent, and describes these forces as if they were secular beings, acting in concrete ways. The problem with such language is that it leads astray. It gives the mistaken impression that the subject matter of language is really "out-there" when the language is really all the time reflexive, i.e., it really speaks of and to man's self-understanding.

¹James M. Robinson, "Hermeneutic Since Barth," in James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (eds.), The New Hermeneutic (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 37.

A text is a fixed writing, language that has gotten into a fixed form. The text is committed to writing and transmitted historically. The proper tools of research, then, are historical tools. Research on the text must be carried on with strict attention to the findings of the critical historical method. Only then will it be clear what the text says.²

Hermeneutic is employed to indicate the text's real referent, to return it to home base. This means it must clarify what the text says to and about man's self-understanding. The task of hermeneutic is to de-mythologize the text: not to rationalize it through explanation, nor to dismiss it, but to determine or set free what self-understanding has been objectified through it.³ In Bultmann's understanding, for example, all theology is really anthropology. The ultimate question which de-mythologizing intends to answer is whether a text contains an authentic self-understanding of human existence, whether on these terms it "speaks" to our situation. Much of Paul's writing or John's is itself de-mythologizing of previous mythological language.⁴ Yet, even they cannot get free of mythological thinking, and much of what they say is simply no longer intelligible in terms of human self-understanding.

²Rudolf Bultmann, Existence and Faith (New York: Meridian Books, 1966), p. 291.

³Norman Perrin, The Promise of Bultmann (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1969), p. 80-1.

⁴Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 33.

Bultmann makes use of the structures of existentialist philosophy as the best contemporary concepts into which to translate biblical language. De-mythologizing means, then, to translate the mythological thought of scripture into the "existentials" of Heideggerian existentialism.⁵

The model which this form of hermeneutic suggests, in its reflexivity, is that of the boomerang. The boomerang is tossed out into free flight, but serves its purpose only when it comes back to rest at the point from which it was launched. So it is with Bultmannian de-mythologization.

For Bultmann the eschatological language of the NT works to reveal man's place in the world. Just as talk about God in Heaven speaks of God's transcendence over man in spatial terms, so the talk about "the end", or "the judgment" speaks of God's transcendence in temporal terms.⁶ Yet, one is mistaken in probing this frankly mythological language for what it says either about Heaven itself or about the judgment day. The importance of this language is that it shows man the emptiness of his present life-style and how dependent he is on powers beyond his control. What is appropriate for man, given this self-understanding, is to be open toward the God who is hidden in His transcendence: who lives "above" man, or who calls to him from an "unknown future."⁷

⁵Robinson, p. 55.

⁶Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology p. 22.

⁷Ibid., p. 23.

As we have already noted, in the NT itself can be seen the tendency and practice of de-mythologizing. For Paul the Christian lives between the times of the Resurrection (which has already broken in the Christ-event) and the final consummation of history in God, a truly future but imminent event. The referent of all the mythical language of the NT is man between the time, i.e., how he may celebrate his new status before God, with all its challenges and demands, at the same time that he waits for the final victory however that may occur.⁸

What must be said in favor of Bultmann's achievement is that he successfully steered a middle or third course between gross literalizing of mythological language and the explaining away of myth in the manner of the social gospel. In our view, moreover, it cannot be denied that much mythological language is an objectification of human self-understanding. This insight does offer a great model for plumbing the richness of ancient literature. We wonder, however, if this is all that mythological language does. We must question Bultmann's contention that

It is possible that the Biblical eschatology may rise again. It will not rise in its old mythological form but from the terrifying vision that modern technology, especially atomic science, may bring about the destruction of our earth through the abuse of human science and technology.⁹

We are certainly not mistaken in the observation that many of the Bible's mythological concepts are thriving precisely in young, well-educated church groups today. The influx, moreover, of eastern religious ideas and practices--including cult and myth--indicates that

⁸Bultmann, Existence and Faith, p. 249.

⁹Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 25.

mythological language still serves an important function even in a technological society. Satanism and the occult also point to the vitality of mystic ideas even if we still seriously doubt their validity. Languages of all kinds do in fact serve the function of self-objectification. We can read in our words much about ourselves. But language also serves other ends, and it is to other models which allow us more adequately to hermeneut these ends that we turn now.¹⁰

The New Hermeneutic

The New Hermeneutic is the name generally given to a recent movement in both theology and philosophy which seeks to reassess and recover the importance of language in understanding. Hermeneutic is now informed by the work of a number of individual scholars. The impetus for the New Hermeneutic began with Wilhelm Dilthey and was greatly helped by the insights and influence of the later Heidegger. Today, the foremost representatives of this movement are three men all of whom have studied under both Heidegger and Bultmann: Ernst Fuchs, Gerhard Ebeling, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. The first two deal specifically with hermeneutic as a theological discipline. Gadamer's work contributes primarily to the areas of aesthetics and philosophy. We have chosen to give attention to each of these men separately, and to begin our treatment with Gadamer. We do this because, for our purposes, Gadamer's work is the simpler, and we believe can be subsumed under the other two men. In turn, we concentrate only on the distinctive contributions of these two

¹⁰A similar point is made by Perrin, p. 77.

for theology, and do not attempt a complete description of their systems independently.

Hans-Georg Gadamer. In Gadamer, language is not the objectification of anything at all. Language is an open space in and through which the world comes to be for man.¹¹ World is not the same as environment--the things that surround man. World is really relationship.¹² Man encounters world, is limited by world, grows in world, experiences world. Language belongs to world, the two are inseparable. World emerges in language. Language does not just point, it is not just sign or symbol.¹³ What language does is to open up the world, to reveal the relationships in which man comes to be. Of course, the expression of language is a mental act.¹⁴ Yet, it would be a mistake to see language as the subjective possession of a person. What one does when he speaks is to find the word that belongs to the experience, the things in the world, rather than experiencing the world, reflecting on it and then creating words that refer to these things.¹⁵ Just as a man belongs to a society, or to a family, so he belongs also to the language which characterizes his culture. It is language that shapes his thinking, his self-understanding. Language and thinking are alike; in fact, there

¹¹Richard E. Palmer, Hermeneutics (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 205.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 201.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 203.

is no thinking without language. Language is not tool, but it is medium. As such, it achieves its primary function when it is transparent, when it lets the world emerge into awareness or when it restructures awareness without becoming itself the focus of attention.¹⁶

A text is an alienation of language.¹⁷ Language should be spoken and heard. A text fixates language. Yet, the text can become a partner in a dialogue with man, can encounter him, can be experienced. What makes this possible is language, of course. Given the character of language, however, it is not enough to give attention alone to the form of the text, or the function of its words. It is misleading, moreover, to inquire after the intention of the author of the text, or to the "real meaning" of the text. This is the problem with contemporary analyses of texts. A text is an answer to a question out of the past. One must hear the text, and probe it for the question that prompted it.¹⁸ But this is more than asking for "real intentions" and "real meanings."¹⁹ It means fusing the horizons of two, finite experiences-- that of the interpreter's and that of the text's.²⁰ It means immersing oneself in the subject, and really opening oneself to what the text has to say. It means laying aside the need to be master over the text, and

¹⁶Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 210.

²⁰Ibid., p. 197.

instead becoming its servant.²¹ It means dialoging with the text--testing its understandings through questioning.²² One asks questions of the text, and allows it to question oneself in return. Through this dialogical process, one indeed comes to understand--that is, is enlarged in his own experience of world, has his awarenesses restructured, struggles and suffers the re-ordering of his expectations.²³

Hermeneutic is the universal way of understanding.²⁴ What goes on in interpreting a text is really what goes on in any human experience. Hermeneutic is less concerned with the particulars of methodology than with the use of method to restrain the interpreter's tendency to impose himself on the text.²⁵ The servant-master dichotomy has already been mentioned. What one does in hermeneuting a passage or text is to place oneself before the text, and allow it to speak its word about the world. One waits for something to happen. One is not simply passive, however, for the fusion of horizons means an active part in the dialogue that leads to understanding.²⁶ The model I think we have here is that of the pilgrim who picks up a diary left behind by those who have long-since passed by this way. The object is to allow another (truly other) experience of the world to shape one's own experience, to open up new

²¹Ibid., p. 208.

²²Ibid., p. 198-99.

²³Ibid., p. 196.

²⁴Ibid., p. 212-14.

²⁵Ibid., p. 208.

²⁶Ibid., p. 207-09.

relationships within the world, so that one grows and fulfills his pilgrimage.

Ernst Fuchs. With Fuchs, we have a further development, or rather sharpening of the hermeneutical understanding we met in Gadamer for the theological enterprise. For Fuchs, the essential function of language, what it does, is to announce the time in which we live.²⁷ This is not time in the usual, chronological sense. The announcement has to do with what it is time for, what situation is present.²⁸ Fuchs uses the family as an illustration: in the home, one announces what the time is for the sake of the responses sought.²⁹ It is bedtime for some, time for discussion for others, time to eat, etc., and all may occur in the same chronological time, that is, at the same hour. In the same way, Jesus as the "word of God" announces what it is time for, namely, the time for God's visitation.³⁰ There is such a thing as a "language gain."³¹ This is the new awareness or openness produced by language itself. Language does not so much create something new as announce its

²⁷Robert W. Funk, Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 55.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ernst Fuchs, "The New Testament and the Hermeneutical Problem," in Robinson and Cobb, p. 125; "At home, one does not speak so that people may understand, but because they understand. (Emphasis his)".

³⁰Funk, p. 55.

³¹Ibid.

arrival. Of course, language can become commonplace, can be abused and distorted through everydayness. Yet, its ability to announce a new time is never completely lost; it is latent, just below the surface, waiting to be discovered.³² This fact that language never really loses its ability to open us up to a new moment, a new situation is what is meant by the concept of "language gain." Each new word, or "word-event," carries forward the new situation which it announces.³³

Fuchs' distinctive contribution to the discussion of hermeneutic comes in his understanding of "text."³⁴ Jesus is the text for preaching. Jesus launches a new language tradition, not in a pre-meditated way but in the fact that his speaking of God and his manner of speaking announces a new time, a new situation for man. That he speaks of and about God is something to marvel at.³⁵ What he says about God, and about man before God, is also a thing to marvel at. This last is a gift which he gives to us, something for us to carry on our way.³⁶ It is not just Jesus, the cause for faith, to which his words refer, but to the experiences faith itself has on its way as well. So the historical Jesus (a problem for contemporary study) and the words he gives us (always studied through historical criticism) form a unity.³⁷ This unity engages us in dialogue and calls forth from us a response.

³²Ibid., p. 55-7.

³³Ibid., p. 59.

³⁴Ibid., p. 60.

³⁵Ibid., p. 61.

³⁶Fuchs, p. 123.

³⁷Funk, p. 62.

Jesus--his life and teaching--creates a new situation for us, opens us up, reinterprets our lives.

The hermeneutical task is to translate (trans-late; über-setzen; set over, transpose)³⁸ the text, i.e., the life and words of Jesus, the Word, so that they announce the time for us. Hermenuein, in Greek means also to interpret. The hermeneutical task is interpretation. But what is in need of interpretation? We ourselves, our life situation.³⁹ It is not the text which has become unclear. It is our situation which is unclear. Fuchs calls our situation, "the situation of death."⁴⁰ So hermeneutic must place the text "there" before us, in that "place" where our situation is illumined for us, where we can give the proper accounting of ourselves.⁴¹ Fuchs calls for translation, interpretation that is not overly concerned with "profundity" but with a word that speaks for us today.⁴² What the Word does, as a saving event, is to speak a yes to life itself, it makes room for life, authentic life.⁴³ Language, as in Gadamer, tends to become alienated from words. But hermeneutic takes as its major task a new placement of words before us so that language, God's gift to us for life, can once again "speak" to us, and call out of

³⁸Robinson, p. 58.

³⁹Funk, p. 57.

⁴⁰Fuchs, p. 132.

⁴¹Robinson, p. 59.

⁴²Ibid., p. 61.

⁴³Ibid., p. 60.

us that which "is determinative for our life."⁴⁴

Gerhard Ebeling. All that has been said, in Gadamer, of "experience," "world", and language as that which opens us up to world, is essentially agreed to in Gerhard Ebeling. Ebeling would agree, further, with Fuchs' assessment that a text really interprets the interpreter, rather than the other way round. Ebeling's emphasis on language and hermeneutic relates to the historical dimension: to traditio as the act of taking up and transmitting (not merely translating in the usual, linguistic sense) what was disclosed through language in a previous word-event.⁴⁵

Language serves two functions: (1) it communicates, passes along information; (2) it provides a common ground for sharing.⁴⁶ In the first case, what is communicated is treated as a thing, even though it may be personal. In the second case, language is encounter, life-changing.⁴⁷ The world is given birth for man in language. Yet, man encounters a jungle of languages today precisely in that world.⁴⁸ It is not only the multiplicity of languages that is confusing, but the multi-directional claims these languages make on man that is confusing as

⁴⁴Funk, p. 47.

⁴⁵Robinson p. 67.

⁴⁶Funk, p. 53.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 54.

⁴⁸Gerhard Ebeling, Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 81-3.

well. Language as such belongs to the community; it is non-sense, literally, to think of each man inventing his own language.⁴⁹ Whatever a man is, he becomes human in and through the acquisition of language, and the language of his community is determinative for how he understands his life as a whole. Yet, a man must speak; he is the "I", the subject of speech. What a man does with his speech, whom he joins, whom he grants audience to, etc., is a personal responsibility.⁵⁰ This responsibility is awesome, and makes the jungle of languages critical. How does one get his way through the jungle, to know where he is and where he is headed? He must give attention to the history of the language he speaks, the tradition that is forwarded to him.

Ebeling gives attention not just to the biblical language, though that must always take precedence for the language of faith,⁵¹ but to the whole Christian tradition. Ebeling began his work in the history of doctrines.⁵² For him, each step in the historical process of interpretation of the biblical language becomes a "text" for the further understanding and appropriation of faith's language. This becomes critical when, as in the present situation, faith's language seems to have lost its ability to speak. Hermeneutic is then the return to the study of how faith's language is to be understood, how it works, until

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 91.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 93.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 188.

⁵²Robinson, p. 63.

such time as this study is made superfluous and faith speaks clearly again.⁵³ The scholar enters the dialogue with the tradition (again, the emphasis is on an active dialogue the traditio is the focus of study, and not the traditum, merely the dead past).⁵⁴ He gives attention not only to the "orthodoxies" of the tradition, but also its expressions in various forms.⁵⁵ He may even give attention to the various theological disciplines, not as mere sub-divisions or branches, but as responses of faith to the word-event in which God has spoken. The sharpening of the scholarly tools, especially the critical historical method, is directed at helping the interpreter of texts (in the larger sense as well as the narrow, biblical sense) hold his own distorting tendencies in check.⁵⁶

The goal of interpretation, of hermeneutic, is to be a faithful participant in the traditio, not merely to pass on what one receives, but to hear it and speak it anew.⁵⁷ Hermeneutic is actually what theology is all about. The test for whether one has spoken correctly what one has truly heard is whether the word that speaks cuts the same way as did the biblical word.⁵⁸ More specifically, Jesus is the criterion for

⁵³Ebeling, p. 187.

⁵⁴Robinson, p. 68.

⁵⁵Gerhard Ebeling, Word and Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), p. 162-64.

⁵⁶Robinson, p. 67.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁵⁸John B. Cobb, Jr., "Biblical Authority: The New Hermeneutic" (Claremont: School of Theology, n.d.).

all hermeneutic.⁵⁹ The effects that Jesus had in illumining the human situation is the same effect which it is the obligation of hermeneutic to make. This is not "timeless" or outside of history; it is not concepts or ideas, but actions and concreteness.

Summary. Though it is difficult fully to assess the profound insights of the New Hermeneutic, we must observe these points which are essential to the preacher in dealing with death and dying. First, constructively, the New Hermeneutic has a far more dynamic understanding of the role of language in human society than that offered in Bultmann. Language is not just self-objectification, a boomerang thrown out into the world only to return to the thrower. Here language is the edifice in which man dwells as man. Language reveals the rooms in which man is accustomed to dwell, the furniture which he takes for granted, the clues which indicate new rooms which he has not yet explored. We believe a great service is performed by the New Hermeneutic in calling us to study our words more deeply, to see where we stand and to see where we are going. When some words are suppressed or when others are given greater currency, it is important to know what these words disclose about the house in which we live. In this context, the prominence of words like "immortality" over against "resurrection," or the suppression of the verb "to die" in favor of "to pass on" really recall how our house is constructed, or rather, which rooms we have closeted ourselves in. Perhaps the re-emergence of the word "death" from its obscurity, from

⁵⁹Ebeling, Introduction..., p. 195.

its being considered almost obscene, is an indication that our society is moving into some other rooms, is in transition.

Negatively, however, the New Hermeneutic does not, in our view, allow for enough creativity on mans' part. The tendency of its language about language is to view man as a passive recipient of words, rather than an aggressive fashioner of words. It cannot be denied that man has his world in language, that language not only reflects the world in which man lives, but also significantly shapes it. Yet man also shapes his world through the shaping of language. Contemporary psychotherapeutic research and procedures tend to indicate that a change in a patient's language can effect a change in his relation to the world and not just mirror a changed relationship.

Two further points are also negative, and we must put them very carefully. The insights of the New Hermeneutic are very fruitful and challenging indeed. Yet, there is a certain character about the New Hermeneutic which makes its insights of limited value to the average preacher in relation to the average layman. On the one hand, the proponents of the New Hermeneutic carry on their work largely within a philosophical context making use of a highly sophisticated, highly complicated set of terms and ideas. It is simply not reasonable to expect this frame of reference to be understood by the working pastor, much less the working layman. This is not to say the work of the New Hermeneutic is irrelevant or unimportant. It should and must be carried forward. A good understanding of language would not count for much if it were still false or misleading. Our criticism applies only to the limited extent to which the results of the New Hermeneutic can be made of use in the

local parish situation. Secondly, the New Hermeneutic, especially in the case of Gerhard Ebling, appears to address itself to a world that has been radically secularized, that is where religion increasingly counts for less and less. This assumption, if it is true, fails to take into account the interpretation of religious language for those who understand themselves as religious, and it is to these people, many of whom still sit in our pews, that the preacher will have to speak concerning life and death.

In this last criticism we are pointing to the need to consider a variety of hermeneutical models on the contemporary scene. Just as in the case of Bultmann's de-mythologizing we could affirm that much language does, in fact, objectify one's self-understanding, but suggested that this was not all that language, mythical or otherwise, could do; so, here, we affirm the new largeness and dynamic that the New Hermeneutic brings into view at the same time that we suggest there are other ways to understand what language does. The tendency of the New Hermeneutic is to interpret religious language in non-religious ways, to see what aspects of life are disclosed through it. Yet, what of religious language itself? Is there really no place left for it as such?

Paul Van Buren

Paul Van Buren attempts an analysis of religious language proper. His general statements about language, however, sound a good deal like the men whose ideas we have so far outlined. Language is, for him, a

way of having a world, a way of responding to the world.⁶⁰ In language, man's whole being is determined inasmuch as giving attention to language means also giving attention to the "whole human existence". "How a man speaks of the world reveals the world of which he is speaking."⁶¹ Beyond this, however, if we inquire about the nature of understanding, Van Buren refers us to "what is going on when people talk", that is, to the observation of action.⁶² Understanding is not some kind of interior, "mental" act. We are not entitled to think of words like "think", "know" and "understand" apart from the actions which characterize them. Words are acts, in the first place: look at such peculiarly verbal activities as promising, or story-telling, or joking.⁶³ In the second place, it would be impossible to conceive of thinking, or knowing or understanding without words. There are, of course, experiences for which there are no words; yet even putting it this way means that the experiences in question have assumed something of a verbal character. In any case, our words about such "non-verbal" experiences, namely, that there are no words for them, already puts them in a very particular and interesting light.⁶⁴

It is this action aspect of language that interests Van Buren

⁶⁰Paul M. Van Buren, The Edges of Language (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 61.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 59.

⁶²Ibid., p. 54.

⁶³Ibid., p. 47.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 51.

and to which he directs his attention. The actions to which words refer or which they imply are fixed by conventions and agreements. Language is rule-governed; that is, it is public behavior.⁶⁵ Yet, the fact of the matter is that we stretch these rules all the time.⁶⁶ The poet, the lover, the punster all make the most extraordinary uses of language. Some persons may feel uneasy about the "wild" uses to which language is occasionally put, but, within limits, no one denies the use of language in this way or seriously questions its use. Quite to the contrary, should these uses of language be eliminated from language altogether, we would, says Van Buren, live in quite a different world. Supposing there were no jokes, that is, that the use of words for humor was completely outside the realm of possibility. The world we live in would not be the same; quite literally, we would live in another, more sombre world. We cannot really imagine what this kind of world would be like any more than we would understand a situation in which animals spoke to us. So, within limits, there is the most marvelous lee-way for the use of language, that is, a vast number of things which language can do.⁶⁷

Van Buren examines the nature of these "limits." He does so by suggesting the model of a platform constructed of planks.⁶⁸ The platform is a stage on which we human beings live and move, work and play.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 78.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 83.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 53.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 82-3.

Assume there are limits to the platform, although in every case we cannot be sure exactly where the limits are. Assume, also, that at least part of our work as human beings is to expand the living space which is our platform. We must do this thing together, that is, no single individual can decide to expand this public platform alone. Now Van Buren suggests that the planks in the platform are the conventions or agreements we have regarding the use of our words. The center of the platform is where these conventions are the clearest, so clear, in fact, as to be taken for granted. Take, for example, our phrase "solid as a rock."⁶⁹ Everyone knows how solid a rock is literally. This is a convention near the center of our stage. But as we move out toward the edges of the stage, toward the areas which are not as well lighted, we might say, as our center, we begin to use this word, or "plank", less conventionally: we can say of an institution that it is solid, or of a person or even of an idea that they are solid. But it is clear that in speaking this way we are approaching the limits of our language. If we were to say that our universe is solid, we would be stretching our planks too far, or rather yanking them out of place and building rather flimsy supports on the edges of our platform with them.

Van Buren suggests that all such stretching or re-building is not as flimsy as our last example. Through the use of language in ways that approach the limits of language in general, in ways that challenge or stretch our imaginations, we sometimes come to see new aspects of our world, new living space is opened up. The poet, the lover and the

⁶⁹Ibid, p. 84-5.

humorist really build on the edges of our language-platform new areas in which man can live, work and play. It is here, too, that Van Buren wants to place religious language.

Religious language is language that pushes at certain points along the outer edges of language.⁷⁰ Where for some, that outer edge is talk having to do with the balance of nature, or the reality of the self, for the Christian, religious boundary-language is speaking of and about history. It is pushing the limits about what history might mean: in the life of the people of Israel, in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, in the life of the community of faith (the Church), language begins in the fairly unambiguous accounts of historical narrative and moves out to make bold and 'wild' claims.⁷¹ When all else has been said that can be said, and yet the Christian wants still to say more, he speaks of election (the central place of Israel in world history), resurrection (the real meaning of a single man's life for others), judgment (the final setting in order of all that is or can be done), and 'God'--the absolute limit to what can be said. Religious language is not language that refers to "objects", for there is plenty of room in the middle of the platform for such talk. Religious language is teetering on the edge of language itself so that man's living space may be expanded and because man is never content with the "great central plains of language" entirely.

One point of clarification may be helpful and necessary here.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 117.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 123.

There is a certain danger of confusion in Van Buren's speaking of the edges of language, especially in light of the recent debate over God-talk. In Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for example, the "edge" of language is only the brink of what man through his own efforts has learned. As man's knowledge is expanded, this brink pushes God increasingly out of the mainstream of life, into an ever narrower area of concern, which is termed religious.⁷²

In Van Buren, the edges are not to be equated with the "marginal experiences of human existence," nor is religious language at the edges "a special province on the outskirts of life."⁷³ If this were so, the word 'God' would amount to no more than a crutch propping up the religious man until time and knowledge pushed the word over. In this understanding, what is at the edge is least important for life. In Van Buren's conception, however, what is at the center of language is only what has been tamed, not what is most significant. The edge is the living frontier where language works with what is not yet tamed. In this view, talk at the edges is not marginal, not a crutch, but is all-encompassing, a constant source of challenge, a constant irritation to expand.

What language "does," in short, then, is to allow man a variety of ways, or places, to live: in the center of language where the conventions are unquestioned, or on the edges of language where life is

⁷²This point is made by Ebeling, Word and Faith, p. 129.

⁷³Ibid.

wilder, if a little more precarious, and where living is expanded into the unknown and the (as yet) unspeakable.⁷⁴

While we have noted that there are similarities already between Van Buren and the New Hermeneuts, we must not overlook their differences. Van Buren disclaims an interest in the ontological character of language whereas the New Hermeneutic is based on such an interest. Van Buren states his purpose thus: "The feature of our language which I want to describe is connected with the fact that we sometimes extend the application of words, stretching their use from the range within which they work straightforwardly, out into areas in which they work less clearly."⁷⁵ It is the speaker as involved with his words, as intending in his words to convey a point, or make use of a word in a peculiar way which interests Van Buren. For Van Buren, words are tools. But compare the remark of Helmut Franz that "the basic thing about a text is not what the author intended to express in words. . . (but) what wills fundamentally to show itself and have its say prior to or apart from any subjective intent." The question is not "How does an author use his language?" but "What shines forth in this text? What shows itself in this text?"

Moreover, Van Buren does not completely disregard the meaning of language in terms of linguistic traditions, but he is more concerned with language as play, with a word's plasticity, than with its historically informed meaning.⁷⁶ We would see this as against Ebeling's

⁷⁴Van Buren, p. 139.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 83.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 47.

position with regard to the traditio, for example.

Finally, while we feel Van Buren might come closest to Fuchs' hermeneutic, for example, in his emphasis on "place," on opening up room for life, nevertheless, Fuchs' understanding of language as "announcing the time" might be too constrictive for Van Buren. The latter wants to discuss the whole realm of religious language in terms of the specific actions that correspond with it, and as it is observable to an ordinary person.

Having said this, we must hasten to assert that all the positions so far examined have more in common than not. All seek to do justice to the phenomenon of language as something more than communication conceived on the model of the transmitting and receiving station. All understand the subject who speaks as in some very important and central ways involved in and determined by the words he speaks. All have sought to do more justice to living language than either the linguistic analysts, on the one hand, or the biblical and doctrinal literalists on the other.

Erich Auerbach

Each of the foregoing hermeneutical models is built on a concept of language. While each is not altogether unconcerned with the relationship of language to the actual historical events to which the language may refer, nevertheless, the historicity of events does not figure prominently in the hermeneutical approach. Talk about the resurrection would still have validity, say, in coming to a self-understanding or in opening up new living space for man, quite aside from whether the

resurrection is conceived as having actually taken place or as having yet to take place. For the simple believer, now as in New Testament times, the historical character of events referred to in the texts of scripture is, to the contrary, precisely that which determines how the text is to be interpreted. We believe alternative models for hermeneutic begun in this perspective should be examined. Thus we shall now turn to consider such a model offered by Erich Auerbach in his work, Mimesis.

With Erich Auerbach, we encounter an understanding of language which, while less comprehensive than the approach taken by Bultmann or the New Hermeneutic, is nevertheless a very fruitful analysis of western literary tradition itself. Auerbach calls his approach to understanding the figural approach.⁷⁷ It arose out of his study of the imitative or mimetic tendency in western literature in which a concern for the flavor and detail of real life holds a dominant influence.⁷⁸ It is Auerbach's thesis that the spread of Christian faith undermined the classical separation of stratification of style and content, and acted to direct the literary attention to the specifics of human life.⁷⁹

The classical literary style was highly stratified in relation

⁷⁷Eric Auerbach, Mimesis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 554-56.

⁷⁸Milton McC. Gatch, Death (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), p. 149.

⁷⁹Auerbach, p. 555; specifically "the story of Christ."

to subject matter.⁸⁰ The sublime style, making use of the elevated diction and highly structured syntax of the educated aristocracy, could be used to express only the subject matter of the most universal, most profound sort. The low or humble style (*Sermo humilis*) correspondingly could give expression only to the most mundane, or to the comic side of life.⁸¹ There was also an intermediate form which could accommodate something of each class of subject matter. The primary consequence of this stratification, however, was the apparently complete inability of the language to give expression to concerns across the lines which the stratification defined.⁸² It was out of place, indeed, not even possible for the Greek poet Homer to reproduce in his elevated poetry the same kind of detail and simple human interest that, for example, occurs in the Genesis account of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac.⁸³

The Hebrew mentality was oriented in another direction entirely in comparison with the classical Greek mind.⁸⁴ It perceived, in the most mundane events, e.g., the freeing of slaves in Egypt, the actions of God, actions of universal meaning, and scope. Here it was not possible to overlook the most common event, and a man dare not act without

⁸⁰Erich Auerbach, Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 51.

⁸¹Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 72.

⁸²Ibid., p. 42; Gatch, p. 149.

⁸³Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 3ff.

⁸⁴Gatch, p. 149.

regard to the meaning of his actions in relation to the divine purpose. The tendency in Hebrew thought is toward the endowing of the simple, the real, the everyday with the deepest significance.

The Life, Passion and Resurrection of Christ, of course, fit the pattern of the Hebrew view of reality instead of the Greek. Here a Galilean "itinerant rabbi" becomes the place and person where God and man meet.⁸⁵ It is in the contact of the low-born with other low-born, with peasants and prostitutes and the sick that the "words of eternal life" are spoken. And it was the criminal's death that this rabbi suffered which was said to constitute the turning point in world history.

The meaning of this shift in linguistic attitude was a long time in coming to articulation. Auerbach claims to find it given specific form in Augustine's De Doctrina Christiana⁸⁶ the Bishop of Hippo gives explicit instructions to his preachers to make plain the great and "sublime" claims of the Christian faith so that the simplest in the audience can hear and understand them, while at the same time giving attention in the most rigorous study to the plight of the common man, and all this because the Word was made flesh.⁸⁷ Even so, the Christian use of language grounded in the Christian understanding of God's relation to the world mediated through the cross effected a broad intermixture of styles and a rapid weakening of the classical forms right

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 72.

⁸⁷Auerbach, Literary Language..., 51f.

from the start. What it meant, finally, was a turning to the realistic, a concentration on the details of daily life and common men, a concern for what we today would call the psychological causes and motivations for actions, and a concern--even a demand for interpreting the meaning of events.⁸⁸ In many Roman writers who were straining to keep the old, classical style, this concern for the everyday shows itself in the grotesque, in blood lust, even in the silly. For a Jerome or an Augustine, it shows up in moving human drama.⁸⁹

Now the figural approach is characterized by the notion that what comes in one event of history is promise or anticipation, and this promise is fulfilled in yet another specific event.⁹⁰ With the sacrifice of Isaac comes the promise of a future for Abraham. This is understood to be fulfilled in the death of Christ, and the new-birth of the Church. In like manner, the death and life of Christ are understood to promise, or point to, the meaning of death and life for every believer.

What is indispensable, moreover, for the figural interpretation of events is the historical facticity of the figura.⁹¹ This is what distinguishes figural interpretation from mere allegorizing.⁹² The allegorical method thrived where myth was prevalent and accepted as

⁸⁸Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 23.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 50.

⁹⁰Gatch, p. 153.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 149.

⁹²Ibid., p. 151.

such. Allegory negates the significance of phenomena; figuralism demands it. Allegory understands myth as the objectification of spiritual truths, but the reality of an historical event is "at the core of figuralism."⁹³ Figuralism sees a connection of promise and fulfillment in actual historical events. This connection is not strictly logical, does not consist in cause and effect relationships; their relation consists in a divine plan, a nexus of divine intentionality.⁹⁴ But the impact of this relation has the most seriously historicizing effect on how one views his place in the world. For this reason, Auerbach argues, even though the Christian writer is convinced of the reality of the Other World, he is nevertheless fully involved in this one.⁹⁵ And this involvement leads to the western literary preoccupation with the real, as we have indicated above.

The figural approach has potential for a hermeneutical model to the degree that a passage or text points to a relationship between the historical event assumed by the text (e.g., Resurrection) and the concrete situation in which one must live and die. "Figuralism endows historical event with meaning." This cuts two ways, both with respect to the historical event in the past, and the historical event in which one is a participant in the present. Milton Gatch observes that figuralism "gave Christians the rationale for their belief in the urgency of event and action and constantly recalled their attention from the

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 73.

⁹⁵Gatch, p. 153.

eternal to the mundane. It provided a device which enabled them to resist the prevailing view that life in the flesh is of little real importance."⁹⁶

Figuralism is not sufficient by itself, for it fails to consider the deeply significant question of the nature of historical events. It is content to deal with what the text assumes is an actual historical event. In this, however, it opens the door for dealing with the assumptions and expectations shared by the vast number of lay people in the Church. It is not enough to dismiss these assumptions and expectations as unimportant because uninformed as to the latest findings in the study of language or biblical research. The ideal is always to deepen the lay person's appreciation and understanding of the biblical faith which the latest scholarship brings to light. But it is even more important to let freedom and love grow where there is so much fear and darkness, as even the New Hermeneutic tells us. And it is precisely the crisis of death that often precludes or makes inappropriate discussion of the latest scholarship. So we would suggest that figuralism meets the demand to interpret the texts of faith in realistic terms in its relating eternal claims to present realities, in its sense of urgency now. And as such, and within a very restricted sense, we would suggest that it is a profitable hermeneutical model for preaching to and about death.

Conclusion

We have examined several different models for the hermeneutical

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 152.

task: for understanding, interpreting and translating texts. We are now in a position to assert our conviction that the variety of theories here presented constitutes a rich resource for the preacher as he confronts the problem of death. We believe it is mistaken to assume that "the responsible interpretation of the (biblical) text today is that interpretation which. . .scores the same point. . .in our situation" as it did in its own.⁹⁷ This assumption has led to the notion that, just as there is a single point to score, there is also a single method which is most appropriate to scoring it. One might argue that all biblical texts really disclose a self-understanding. In this light, only that method which brought out the "self-understanding" embodied in the text would be adequate or appropriate. On the other hand, one might argue that the primary point of a biblical text is to speak at the edge of the speakable, to push out the limits of human living space. Here the importance of language is not what it reveals about our self-understanding, but what effects it has on the world in which we live. "God is love" may involve me and my self-understanding, but its primary intention, in this view, is to change the face of a world that is often hostile and threatening. The only adequate or appropriate method from this perspective is to show how the biblical word "creates living space". But does this pitting of one hermeneutic against another really get at the richness of language? Does the biblical text really score only a single point?

Let us recall our discussion in the last chapter of the New

⁹⁷Cobb.

Rhetoric. There we saw how some arguments may be based on agreements known as values. We further observed that the strength of values in argumentation derived from their generalness; that as a value was applied with greater specificity, the agreements as to the meaning of the value were weakened. This suggests that in some arguments ambiguity may be an essential requirement in order for the argument to carry weight. This further suggests that, in some cases at least, the search for a single point which one might score with the use of his hermeneutic may be doomed by the nature of the text itself. Here we may point back to our word studies. In both the terms ζωή and θάνατος we had to admit a certain unclarity about the way in which these terms were used. Paul, for example, may speak of death now as a physical event, now as a spiritual or even psychological state. Life has always a quality of presence, but also of futurity about it: it is received, but it is also to be hoped for. The strength of these terms in Paul often derives from precisely their ambiguity, their lack of specificity. In a certain way, the word "the wages of sin is death" rings true in our experience: sin, either as self-serving or as immorality, does lead to a shutting off of the possibilities of life. Yet, should we desire to press these words further, say, to conclude that if man had never sinned, men would not die today, we may find that they break remarkably easily. The ambiguity of the word "death" in this case, indicating both a physical event and an emotional state, even an existential style, is precisely that which enhances the argument and gives it the ring of truth.

Of course, to maintain that a biblical text does not score one and only one point is not to maintain that just any point may be served

by a biblical text. The point of a careful exegesis is to exercise some discipline over oneself in using the biblical texts, to hold one's arbitrary prejudices in check. Having said this, however, we must go on to say that a biblical text may in fact score many points.

We suggest that, just as there are many different circumstances in which the preacher is called to speak to the problem of death--in grief at a funeral, in equipping his parishioners to deal with death as a fact of life, in enabling our society to see how its denial or understanding of death influences moral, social and political decisions--so the hermeneutical models examined here may each prove fruitful for understanding, interpreting and translating the Christian word about death. In brief, we maintain that a given biblical text may well indicate any or all of the following: how death shapes our self-understanding, how the world which meets us shows our situation to be full of death, how in speaking of death we may shape our environment, or how one event can illumine the meaning of life and death for another person in another time and place. We do not deny that one model may be more effective or fruitful in a given circumstance or with a given text. Here the pastor may make use of other disciplines than those associated with either exegesis or hermeneutic. One's counseling experience may indicate, for example, that what a person needs to hear, the Gospel that would be truly good news, is not what death says about his own situation--that he is limited, finite, in need of faith, etc.--but is that death is not fearful, not an unknown territory. The hermeneutic that gets at one's situation may be very thoroughgoing in its analysis of human attempts to evade this basic situation, while the hermeneutic that redeems some living space from death may be quite mythical, picturesque

or simplistic in its language. Yet both may be quite appropriate to the biblical text.

The point at issue is whether the preacher will avail himself of these varied hermeneutical resources, and give attention to how each may be appropriate to his circumstances, or whether he will seek only one method or model and thus limit his own effectiveness and the power of the scripture to speak. We believe that we have shown that it is not only possible but necessary to pursue the first alternative, and eschew the second.

Chapter 4

THE THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

Introduction

In this chapter we shall attempt to explicate a theological approach to death which will enable us to integrate the insights gained from our exegetical work and facilitate our use of the hermeneutical models.

Theology seeks for the interrelationships of experience and revealed truth.¹ Theology is the rational reflection on what we have received from faith, and the exploration of the appropriate responses implied in faith. A theological approach offers us a basic perspective on the data of experience and especially the experiences of faith, so that we may more intelligently articulate who and what we have believed and what meaning this has for life as a whole.

An investigation of a theological approach to death should include attention not only to what is said, but also to the sources for the theological statements, to the backings or evidence for these statements, and to the way in which these statements are used, that is, their meanings and the arguments which they are supposed to carry.²

¹John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 6; see also Walter Marshall Horton, Christian Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), pp. 42-3.

²David Tracy, "Theology as Public Discourse," Christian Century (March 19, 1975), pp. 280-81.

In this chapter we shall examine three theological approaches to death--those taken by Gordon Kaufman, Russell Aldwinckle and Ladislaus Boros. The first two have been chosen for their representational adequacy. Gordon Kaufman represents, in our view, a theological approach which makes use of our common human experience, specifically historical experience, as its prime source. If other theologians are to be faulted, according to Kaufman, it is because they have not taken historical experience seriously enough. Russell Aldwinckle represents, on the other hand, a theological approach which is grounded in the traditional formulas of the early church as they are understood and interpreted by the reformed church. If human experience seems confused or problematic, it is so because these formulas have not been sufficiently heeded or proclaimed. In this rather specific sense, Kaufman is the "liberal" and Aldwinckle the "conservative".

Ladislaus Boros, writing from a Roman Catholic background, has been chosen for both the uniqueness and cogency of his theological approach to death. Boros seeks to do justice equally to common human experience, through an extensive philosophical investigation of everyday human acts, and to the theological tradition represented in credal and biblical formulations. For this reason he defies categorization as to his basic approach.

Our investigation of these three approaches cannot begin to be exhaustive. The first two treatments will be relatively brief while the third is more extensive. We will ask in each case for the items mentioned above, namely sources, evidences, meanings and argumentative implications. We have endeavored not merely to present the first two

approaches as foils for the last approach. We take them, on the contrary, to be quite significant and typical of the options presented in most theological systems.

Two Moments in the Theological Approach to Death

There are two moments in the theological approach to death: the past and the future. For Christian theology, the past moment that is decisive for an approach to death is the death and resurrection of Jesus. On this fact there is general agreement, though, as might be expected, there are considerable differences as to how this moment is to be regarded or interpreted.

The second moment is the future. Here, there is usually a parting of the ways according to general regard for human experience: in the "liberal" approach, the future is the eschaton, that "event" or "time" which ends all human experience and reveals it for what it is; in the "conservative" approach, the future is an after-life which follows death and judgment in which one will receive one's reward. The future has both a personal and a cosmic significance. But whether we talk about a personal end, or the end of the world, the "liberal" believes the "end" is to be understood as a goal which has its primary consequences for actions here and now, and the "conservative" believes the "end" marks a new dimension of living and has its primary consequences "out there". When it is said that the "end is at hand" in the New Testament, the "liberal" takes this to mean that the eschaton, that toward which the world is striving and for which it was created, has become known and reveals whether and to what degree we are in accord

with it. To the "conservative", the same phrase might mean that the new world to which the Christian really belongs by virtue of his new birth as a child of God is upon us, and that he had better prepare for a change of address.

In the three theological approaches which we turn now to examine, we shall look at both these past and future moments. We shall ask both, "How does this approach understand the death and resurrection of Jesus and its consequences for the believer's own death and hope?" and, "How does this approach understand death as a future event?"

Gordon Kaufman

In Kaufman's view, the way to arrive at what the "resurrection of Jesus" refers to is to take the earliest form of the tradition regarding the resurrection and examine it.³ Taking Paul's statement in I Cor 15.3ff., he arrives at the definition of the "resurrection of Jesus" as the appearances of Jesus. These appearances may be explained on the human level, i.e., in terms of objective facts, as hallucinations.⁴

These hallucinations gave rise among Jesus followers to the hypothesis that he must have risen from the dead, thus the empty tomb stories.⁵ These hallucinations do not themselves as yet carry any

³Gordon D. Kaufman, Systematic Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 417f.

⁴Ibid., p. 425.

⁵Ibid., p. 421.

meaning. It is only after the disciples interpret them in terms of resurrection that their meaning comes clear: the community of love and forgiveness which Jesus created (called into being) has validity beyond his death, or rather precisely through it. His own self-giving on behalf of this community is now vindicated in the appearances assumed to be manifestations of his continued existence. But there is no longer any real interest in his mode of existence, beyond the rather skimpy reports of his differences.⁶ What is really significant about this continued existence is what it means for the community: ". . .It was really what Jesus' resurrection signified for the disciples that was the crucial dimension of that event."⁷

And what the resurrection signified was nothing less than that God had broken in on the world in love and forgiveness, that he was still breaking in on it through the community which Jesus had called into being.⁸ Kaufman makes these important points: The resurrection, as hallucination, is historical; the hallucinations actually happened whatever may be said of the physical Jesus. Through these hallucinations, a community of people sensed new power through love and forgiveness, and this too is historical. That this community, in its preaching of the resurrection, actually turned themselves and the world upside down, is also historical. Belief that God was present in all this is a matter of faith, and in the case of the hallucinations, a matter of

⁶Ibid., p. 427.

⁷Ibid., p. 428.

⁸Ibid.

scandal which is and always has been appropriate to the Christian proclamation.⁹

The importance of the resurrection is that it created community, not how. The resurrection does not, in fact, draw attention to the mode of Christ's existence, but the meaning of that existence through history.

Next Kaufman turns his attention to the "resurrection of the body", a doctrine based on the resurrection of Jesus. While this doctrine resembles mythological speculation, it nevertheless points to an almost contemporary understanding of man, namely, that it is the "whole man" who must be saved, healed, brought back from the destructive alienation that his sin has produced.¹⁰ This "whole man" concept is in direct opposition to the idea of the immortality of the soul, based as it is on a dualism of man's nature. Early Christian faith, like modern psychology, does not conceive of man simply in terms of his "faculties", or in terms of his parts. It understands man to be a creature, wholly integrated, for which the terms "soul," "body," "spirit," "flesh," merely indicate facets of his life before God.

The goal of the Christian faith is to enable man to accept his creatureliness before God. "His proper life as God's creature is the acceptance of his role and tasks in gratitude and love, not demanding to be some other being with some other--perhaps immortal--nature."¹¹ In

⁹ Ibid., p. 425f.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 466.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 470.

Jesus Christ we are given a model for this kind of trusting acceptance, a model which directs our attention to the present moment in full engagement. As for the future, the Christian must fully entrust himself to God's care and keeping. Speculation about the future, say in terms of heaven or hell, is no longer appropriate though perhaps valid for some period in the past.¹² Indeed, it is really no longer possible even to look for some connection between the resurrection of Jesus and that of the individual, for this kind of thinking misunderstands the biblical doctrines. The doctrine of both resurrections is grounded in the doctrine of God.¹³ This means that the gross literalizing characteristic of traditional ideas concerning the resurrection of Jesus on the one hand, and the tendency to become overly preoccupied in speculations concerning the after-life on the other, have disengaged themselves from what the Christian says about God. Resurrection is a shorthand way of speaking of God's victory, God's triumph: in the case of Jesus, His triumph over the present, His continuing work in the midst of human sin and suffering; in the case of the "body," His triumph over man's self-destructiveness, His triumph over that death which takes from the individual all his creativity and meaning. "Each man has his own beginning and end, and his own particular place within the ongoing movement of history." The individual must content himself with this important affirmation, while leaving it to God to disclose how and why this is so.

¹²Ibid., p. 463f.

¹³Ibid., p. 467.

The Christian insists that God is active and works to fulfill His own purposes in history, calling each individual to play his role out in this overall intentionality.

Kaufman's constructions are at once attractive and somewhat ambiguous. They are attractive in that they call the individual Christian to account for the present moment. They give emphasis in this sense to what is properly biblical in the doctrines of resurrection. Yet, they are ambiguous in the way in which they leave the individual in the lurch. A fact of life for this age is that persons see themselves as individuals, and when one speaks of hope, as Kaufman does, one must address himself to individual hope. Yet, it is not clear how, in Kaufman's view, the individual is given room for personal hope. In the last analysis, though he maintains that individual hope is an essential element in the Christian Gospel, Kaufman gives emphasis only to the possibility "that each man's work, and man himself, should find proper place in God's kingdom;"¹⁴ "Each man's work" refers to what one completes on earth; "man himself" refers to mankind in general. Neither of these anticipates any further dimension for the individual, and the future itself is anticipated only as a playing out of the historical forces which are the expression of the divine purpose in creation. Even the phrase "New heaven and new earth" speak really more of the continuity between this world and the future in its historical connections,

¹⁴Ibid., p. 472.

than of any radically new creation.¹⁵ So the individual and collective hope which Kaufman points to boils down to a hope that one will be remembered by God in the ongoing work of creation, that somehow, what one has done as an individual, and the human enterprise as a whole will count importantly in the final outcome of the divine will. One is not entitled to hope for more than this, especially in view of the fact that Jesus' own resurrection and death must be seen in the same light.

We have said that Kaufman's approach is attractive. Perhaps that should be qualified, however, for it would be incorrect to assume that such a stoic hope as the one held out here could appeal to a very large portion of society. This criticism must not be taken to mean that we here are interested only in that theological approach to death and dying which would appeal to the largest number of persons. But we believe that the Christian Gospel speaks in very large, very broad terms, indeed that it calls for universal attention, as even Kaufman himself rightly maintains. Yet, the question is as to how these claims are to be put. While Kaufman's approach is attractive, it is so to those who have been accustomed to think in existential terms. This means that his way of putting the claims of the Gospel will appeal to a rather limited, though perhaps significant, portion of the Christian audience, and of the world at large. We would criticize his approach not for what it says so much as the relatively limited manner in which he says it. For the contemporary preacher, this means that Kaufman's

¹⁵Ibid., p. 473.

approach to a "theology of death and dying" is but one approach, however illuminating or helpful it may be.¹⁶ The contemporary preacher is faced with many different audiences in the course of his work, with differing expectations and vocabularies. It would be a mistake for him, then, to settle upon this as the only adequate response of the Gospel in the face of death.

Russell Aldwinckle

Russell Aldwinckle is one theologian who has undertaken a construction of a theology of death which makes room for the traditional Christian hope of personal survival of death.¹⁷ Aldwinckle is disturbed with precisely the kind of modernizing of the Christian gospel as is represented by Gordon Kaufman's Systematic Theology. It is not the modernizing itself against which he argues, but rather what this modernizing, or perhaps more accurately secularizing trend means for the Christian faith. In Aldwinckle's view, most modern Christians would still cling to some notion of a personal after-life, but at the same time would probably tend to be somewhat agnostic about exactly what this belief would entail, what concepts would be adequate to express it.¹⁸ What this situation ultimately represents is a loss of Christian hope under the guise of retaining it; without a clear expression of the

¹⁶Our term, not Kaufman's.

¹⁷Russell Aldwinckle, Death and the Secular City (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 19.

¹⁸Ibid.

Christian hope in terms of future, individual existence beyond death, according to the author, the Christian is really retreating before the general agnosticism of the secular society in which we live, an agnosticism which touches upon the large issues of God and the meaning for life.¹⁹ Aldwinckle proposes to devote his attention to the reclamation of the doctrine, which he asserts is apostolic, and therefore truly the Christian hope, of a personal, actual existence in relationship to God after death.

What are the sources for Aldwinckle's theology? He claims first to find his source in the New Testament. This is so because, while the Old Testament religion does not specifically rule out any hope for future, personal survival of death, it nevertheless does not specifically give support to the idea.²⁰ The religion of the intertestamentary literature shows, in fact, where the logic of the Old Testament really leads in its elementary efforts at reflection on the future life.²¹ But it is the New Testament proper which raises that hope which is distinctively Christian, and from which all serious statements concerning this hope must be taken.

It is not enough, however, simply to make use of the New Testament as the source for a theology of death. To be Christian means to adhere to the religion of Jesus, that is to make use of Jesus' teachings and his own life, as the primary source for a theology of death. As

¹⁹Ibid., p. 23.

²⁰Ibid., p. 47.

²¹Ibid.

Aldwinckle examines Jesus as a source he finds evidence that Jesus did, in fact, personally believe in and teach an individual existence beyond death. This evidence, surprisingly, consists in only one text, Mark 12.18-27, and parallels, and in the conjecture that Jesus was educated in a form of Judaism which, by his time, naturally assumed some sort of after-life, specifically in terms of resurrection.²²

Beyond the New Testament in general, and the teachings of Jesus, we have also the resurrection of Jesus as a source for a theology of death. What this really means is that the Church's teaching of the resurrection, and her understanding of it expressed in the 'apostolic' tradition also becomes a source, though Aldwinckle himself is not so clear on this issue. It would be difficult, however, to allow the resurrection of Jesus to stand as itself a source for a theology of death without interpretation, for, like all events, it would remain in itself ambiguous without interpretation. Indeed, Aldwinckle proceeds to give a lengthy interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus just because it figures most prominently in the bulk of his work, and his interpretation is through and through based on what is "traditional," what is "apostolic," in other words what has been historically defined as the orthodox Christian belief.²³ We would maintain that while Aldwinckle claims the resurrection of Jesus as itself a biblical source, he really is referring to the postbiblical interpretations given to it, and this

²²Ibid., p. 48ff.

²³Ibid., p. 53ff.

constitutes a third source for his theology of death; the New Testament, the teachings of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus as traditionally understood.

These sources warrant a very clear belief in personal immortality.²⁴ This must not be taken to mean that there is something about the individual which, of its own nature, possesses life that cannot be terminated.²⁵ This belief is certainly not warranted by traditional Christian faith. The immortality for which one can hope is a gift of life bestowed by God on those to whom he wills to give it.²⁶ This life will be real, however, in the sense that it will be more than God's remembrance of the person and his work. Life after death in the sense in which Aldwinckle talks about it is a self-conscious existence of the person in which he can know and relate himself to God and to other persons who have also survived death.²⁷ Aldwinckle sees two modes of existence as each possible: (1) an embodied existence of some sort, though not a simple resuscitation of this physical, earthly body as anticipated by some forms of late Hebrew thought; (2) a disembodied, spiritual or "psychological" existence in which, nevertheless, the reality of one's presence and the presence of others can be perceived, and in which relationships can be established. He does not opt for one over the other, and hints that perhaps the two are reconcilable for,

²⁴Ibid., p. 76.

²⁵Ibid., p. 94.

²⁶Ibid., p. 99f.

²⁷Ibid., p. 166f.

given the new world of the after-life, our perceptions of what "bodies" are, and of space and time in general might be so altered as to make these distinctions meaningless.²⁸

Aldwinckle's sources also allow for an understanding of hell and judgment as well as heaven and bliss. Hell, however, would refer only to final separation from God, a decision made by the "permanently impenitent" to be shut out of existence altogether, and would not entail the traditional notion of eternal punishment--a concept which in the author's view is irreconcilable with Jesus' teaching concerning a loving God.²⁹ Heaven would be a radically new mode of existence of which little can actually be said since our knowledge of it must be largely by analogy with earthly life.³⁰

A final claim which Aldwinckle makes for his construction of a theology of death from his sources is the utter impossibility of this theology supplanting a real concern for the present world.³¹ In fact, it is his understanding that no real concern for the present world and its transformation can be expressed without also a convincing and abiding hope in a personal survival beyond death.³² In any case, the Christian understanding of the world entails both a commitment to personal

²⁸Ibid., p. 97f.

²⁹Ibid., p. 116.

³⁰Ibid., p. 169.

³¹Ibid., p. 172.

³²Ibid., p. 183.

existence beyond death as well as a commitment to the present world and the tasks therein. Aldwinckle criticizes theologians of many shades, from Tillich to the theologians of hope, and all the secularizers between them precisely on the ground that by giving up a claim to a future existence they have abandoned the Christian hope and have thereby also given up its power to renew and remake the world.

We must commend Aldwinckle for his attempt to undertake such a large project as he set himself. The author attempts to take a middle course between the literalists on the one hand, and the secularists on the other. He does not allow a simple-minded, "fundamentalistic" interpretation of the scriptures. He insists on a critical analysis of the scriptural materials. At the same time, he warns against the extreme uses of the form-critical method, fearing that it will sweep away all ability to refer to and make use of the teaching of Jesus or an assessment of his resurrection.³³ Aldwinckle tries with desperate sensitivity to stake out a place for the traditional Christian faith and its response to death. He knows all too well the emptiness of much modern thinking and living, and it is his conviction that the Christian message contains a word of hope, but precisely a hope which does not get bogged down in the complexities of daily life. The modern exercise of theologies of hope usually wind up in a mire because they cannot see beyond the closedness of historical events, according to him.³⁴

³³Ibid., p. 48.

³⁴Ibid., p. 43.

Yet, there are many draw-backs to Aldwinckle's construction. First, Aldwinckle rather naively assumes that the teaching of Jesus can be equated with a specific doctrine of an after-life. He rather casually brushes aside all problems connected with arriving at the words of Jesus themselves, and asserts that to follow out the findings of the form-critical method would amount to abandoning a search for Jesus' teachings. Because, apparently in his view, the words of Jesus are so crucial to a doctrine of an after-life, he presses on to the uncritical acceptance of the Gospel accounts of Jesus teachings as the ipsissima verba. This procedure is, of course, quite questionable. Still, having gone to this length to include the words of Jesus as a source for a theology of death, Aldwinckle is able only to offer one text as evidence for Jesus' belief in an after-life. What is more, this text is not a doctrinal text at all, but rather a text that arises out of an attempt by some partisans to entrap and discredit Jesus. Even if we assumed that the text contained the hint that Jesus indeed possessed a doctrine of an after-life (and really all the text does reveal seems to be an affinity for some belief, not a formal doctrine), nevertheless, the exact nature of this doctrine and its implications, clarifications and qualifications are in no sense suggested. We believe that it is unfortunate that Aldwinckle sacrificed so much in the way of a critical methodology only to arrive at such a flimsy support for his theology. We believe also that this defect accounts for his electing to pursue, not the words of Jesus, but the traditional understanding of the resurrection of Jesus as the norm for his theology. It is the "fact" that Jesus was raised from the dead that forms the basis for the Christian

conviction that there is an after-life. Aldwinckle devotes considerable energy to showing that this "fact" is an historical "fact," that is, a physical and literal event.³⁵ Yet the author fails to show how, even given this interpretation, the resurrection gives criteria for assessing the claims of a doctrine of the after-life. The New Testament may indeed wish to claim more for the appearances of Jesus as the resurrected one than that they were "hallucinations" as in Kaufman; but it is also a certainty that the New Testament itself knows the resurrection to be an enigma not open to a clear, settled formulation such as would be required for a doctrine. It appears that Aldwinckle feels the affirmation that the resurrection of Jesus was an historical event warrants all the conclusions he makes for a doctrine of the after-life, when in actuality, it is his doctrine of the after-life that demands a certain interpretation of the resurrection.

Secondly, Aldwinckle's conception of continuity, that is the notion that personal survival entails a certain self-sameness about the individual between this life and life after death, and his repeated assertion that the after-life will be a radically new existence seems to be inconsistent.

To eliminate completely all temporal language about a 'going on' is . . . very difficult to do without giving the impression that persons do not survive as persons in the next life. Yet roundly to deny the latter possibility is to remove an important element of New Testament teaching and of belief of the great majority of Christians from the beginning of the faith until now.³⁶

³⁵Ibid., p. 58; cites Pannenburg extensively in support of his views.

³⁶Ibid., p. 95.

Aldwinckle speaks against Tillich's belief that a complete break occurs at death such that it is impossible to speak of a self-conscious existence beyond death because that would require temporal categories. Yet his own approach is questionable. It is not clear that the New Testament view and the understanding of "the great majority of Christians" through history is one and the same. Granted that the New Testament speaks of a hope in God's future, it is not clear that this hope entails a specific conception of temporal continuity. On the one hand there is a reticence to say what the future will be like; on the other hand a difficulty in knowing how to handle certain, e.g., apocalyptic, expressions or ideas which do tend to be rather specific. But the crucial question is why the author holds to the notion of continuity at all if he wishes also to hold that the future will be radically new? At the beginning of his book, Aldwinckle takes umbrage at a widespread agnosticism typical of contemporary Christians on the matter of death. Yet he himself calls for a kind of agnosticism as regards the details of the after-life, though, to be sure, he claims this could not be a total agnosticism.³⁷ But it is not at all clear where Aldwinckle wants to draw the line on this 'partial agnosticism'. He devotes a complete chapter to speculating on the nature of the personal existence after death. He concludes:

We have to admit that we do not know for certain whether the 'self' can exist without a body of any kind. This would involve scientific and philosophical knowledge which modesty compels us to admit we do not have at present. Our line of argument certainly implies that we do not simply identify the 'self' with a body as

³⁷Ibid., p. 100.

such, whether physical or 'spiritual'. The 'self' is still more than the body, even if the latter is a soma pneumatikon. We accept H. D. Lewis' contention that the self is not the body, however closely related it may be to it.³⁸

Now the question is what sense there could be to speaking of a continuity of the person beyond death if there is not anything with which to identify it. We know ourselves as selves in earthly existence precisely in and through our bodies. It is difficult enough to imagine what we would be without our physical bodies. Nevertheless, a spiritual body is one way this need to identify ourselves as selves has been answered when speculating about the after-life. Even Paul made use of the concept.³⁹ We believe it is straining our ability even to conceive of continuity and identity when we are now told that not even this spiritual body, whatever that may be, is to be identified with the 'self' that will be preserved, that will "go on." The 'self' we would know in this circumstance would be so radically different as to preclude our speaking of it as the same 'person' we knew on earth. So Aldwinckle seems to undermine his own insistence that there is a continuity between our life at present and the one which we will have in that radically different state of existence known as heaven.

Finally, it is not at all clear that Aldwinckle has accomplished the goal he set himself of reclaiming the concept of a personal existence beyond death as the distinctive Christian hope. Aldwinckle believes he is being faithful to the biblical tradition by reaffirming a

³⁸Ibid., p. 98f.

³⁹See the exegesis in Chapter Five, below.

doctrine of the after-life as such. This means, in reality, that Aldwinckle has appropriated concepts that go beyond scripture in order to interpret what hopes are expressed by scripture. There is nothing wrong in this procedure, of course, for this is the task of every age, namely the interpretation of the historic and biblical faith in terms that suit the particular context. Yet, Aldwinckle seems merely to repeat the formulations of a past age without making clear their implications for this age. He believes, as we have seen, that secularism has caused a steady retreat from Christian confidence in the face of death. Yet he scarcely asks why this retreat has taken place, why Christians have failed to give articulation to their hope as it relates to death and dying. We would suggest that this reticence is due precisely to the character of the formulations which Aldwinckle merely repeats, namely that these terms are really more confusing than clarifying and that they therefore have lost their cogency and appropriateness. This does not mean as Aldwinckle seems to think, that the Christian hope itself is irrelevant or has been lost. It means simply that a time has come when a new way of speaking of the Christian hope may be emerging.

Partial Summary

We have examined now two theological approaches to the problem of death which we believe to be fairly representative of the contemporary approaches available in general. In Kaufman, we found a theology of death based on the assumption that history is a closed system in and through which one must find the meaning for life. If the two great symbols of the Christian hope, the resurrection of Jesus and the future

resurrection of the body have any significance for contemporary man, they must have it precisely in historical terms. Thus the resurrection of Jesus refers to an historical process in which the Church was formed as the sign of God's concern and promise for the world, and in some sense as the agent for His will expressed historically. It is this and nothing more. As for the resurrection of the body, this is taken as the promise that God's will for the future will also be expressed in the historical redemption of society. In this context, an individual hope beyond the knowledge here and now that, by being faithful to God's purposes, one will have played out his proper role in the coming to fulfillment of God's plans, is simply not intelligible. We are in a position now to assert that Kaufman's is a theology that only leads up to, but is essentially silent about death. It is a theology, not of death, but before death. Since personal history ends with personal death, it would be difficult in Kaufman's view to do any other kind of theology.

In Aldwinckle we have seen an attempt to rescue both these symbols from a steady and complete retreat before secularized thought. Yet, we have seriously criticized his attempts on the grounds that they do not adequately take account of contemporary experience, and instead simply seek to stem the retreat by erecting a fortress of outworn formulations. We are now in a position to assert that in Aldwinckle's case, what we have is a theology, not of death, but after death. Since there is a kind of continuity between this world and the next which makes the next world really the more important it would be unimportant to do any other kind of theology.

Aside from these two basic kinds of approach in theology, we have witnessed in the last few years a spate of literature giving emphasis either to one or the other of these moments relating to death. For the most part, the literature has concentrated on the moment before death: the psychological, physical or even sociological aspects of death and the theological implications. This may be called the theology of dying, but seems to be less informed by theology than by the practical disciplines just mentioned.

One recent work has attempted a theology of death proper: not what leads up to the death of the individual, nor what one can expect after death, a theology of the after-life; but a theology of the moment of death itself. This is the work of Ladislaus Boros set out in his The Mystery of Death. It is to this monumental work that we turn presently.

Ladislaus Boros

The Mystery of Death is apparently addressed to theologians and is written in a highly technical style. While the book occasionally reaches almost poetic heights of expression, it seems to rest most of its argumentation on notions and ideas that are assumed to be familiar to the reader. The net effect is that the text is a kind of abbreviated treatment of many diverse strands of thought, some philosophical and others theological, which often leaves the reader with a desire for more complete explication. Add to this the fact that the writer himself is attempting to fashion his argument in a form that meets the demands of

dogmatic theology enunciated by the First Vatican Council,⁴⁰ demands which do not lend themselves to a fresh and vigorous style, and it is understandable why this book, first published in America in 1965, has not received more widespread attention. Nevertheless, for all these 'drawbacks', Boros' work is cogent and impressive, and is thoroughly stimulating and creative.

Boros begins his work with an hypothesis:

Death gives man the opportunity of posing his first completely personal act; death is, therefore, by reason of its very being, the moment above all others for the awakening of consciousness, for freedom, for the encounter with God, for the final decision about his eternal destiny.⁴¹

In short, Boros describes the point of his work as the explication of the "hypothesis of a final decision."

In order to lay the ground for this explication, Boros gives attention to five "methodological postulates".

First, death must be understood properly as a metaphysical process. This means, first, that simple observation of the process of dying will not yield the kind of information or data necessary for theology.⁴² This kind of observation properly belongs to the physical sciences. Secondly, not the fact of death, but the meaning of death is the problem with which the philosopher and theologian are concerned. Traditionally, the metaphysical understanding of death has been expressed as the separation of the soul from the body. While this formu-

⁴⁰Ladislaus Boros, The Mystery of Death (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p.85.

⁴¹Ibid., p. ix.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 1-3.

lation is no longer adequate as a description of the process of death,⁴³ it serves to distinguish the nature of the metaphysical concern from that of the medical: the separation of soul is not open to empirical determination, yet it symbolizes a fact, namely that death is a radical transformation which has vast implications for life as a whole. Death as an act, or a moment of decision is not, then, to be confused with the process of dying, its throes, agonies, experiences or treatments. Separation means a transformation of the self which has decisive importance both for the past and the destiny of the individual.

In order for a decision to be made in death, however, there must be something temporal about the death process, an interval of time in which a decision may be made. Yet, the metaphysical description of death understands this process as essentially non-temporal.⁴⁴ The second postulate deals with this problem. Boros is aware that temporality is a large problem in philosophical thought. He suggests the following analysis as a way through the problems presented by time. There are three levels or stages to time: the nonpersonal, the personal, and the purely spiritual. These are differentiated in terms of intensification and extension. The first, nonpersonal, level of time is that which goes on all about us without personal meaning. Being emerges in "flashes" from nonbeing, and then just as quickly re-emerges again.⁴⁵ These flashes form a succession which we usually regard as time in the

⁴³Ibid., p. 171, n. 3.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 4ff.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 6.

simplest sense. At the personal level, we individually compress or intensify these flashes into moments full of meaning and decision.⁴⁶ We mark our lives by these moments of intensification. Here we become aware of the presence of being for us, and our own place and presence in being. Here, too, we glimpse what purely spiritual time might be like, a complete intensification of experience and being, a complete presence to ourselves and to the world. This last is the final moment, the spiritual level of time, that moment which is reached only in death.⁴⁷ What this means is that, while death is metaphysically a nontemporal line of demarcation, a point of radical transformation, it nevertheless has a temporal dimension inasmuch as the last moment of life and the first moment of death are one and the same; they interpenetrate. There is, then, an interval just large enough to allow for a decision to be made, a moment large enough, moreover, for the complex acts of awakening, perception, understanding and decision all to take place. It is important to stress that this moment is highly compressed, and does not require our speculating as to what occurs after death. The moment of death as radical transformation is what Boros wants to focus on, and he is not at all suggesting some sort of disembodied thinking process which takes place only after death. Boros admits to the limitations of language at this point, but wants to assure the reader that there is no problem presented by the nature of time which would preclude the possi-

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

bility of a personal decision.⁴⁸

The next postulate is drawn from Heidegger's analysis of death in Being and Time: "Death is a fundamental modality of living, concrete existence."⁴⁹ This indicates that death is carried within man's existence as such. To borrow a phrase from Augustine, man is dedicated to death. This means more than that death may occur at any moment. It means that man is oriented to death as fruit is oriented to ripeness. Death defines man. It is the consummation of what he is. Man's life is always a debt outstanding, that is, there is always before him that which he has not yet fulfilled. At death, and only at death is this debt fully paid, his existence fulfilled. This, in turn, means that death conditions man's experience, that it is everywhere present. And even though it is true that no man can experience death through another, yet we are not entitled to say on this account that nothing can be known about death before one dies. Since death defines and conditions life for man, man experiences the presence of death daily.⁵⁰

This leads to the fourth postulate, that through the "transcendental method," that is, investigation of "the acts of consciousness," we may discover the implications and nature of death here and now.⁵¹

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 10.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 11f.

The final postulate has to do with the basic starting point for the analysis of death: the experience of wonder. While this experience is difficult to define precisely, at the very least it means the awareness that one's existence has been "transplanted from its everyday experience and snatched away to the exalted realm of being."⁵² It means apprehending that one's existence has "no real home", that one is a stranger to oneself.⁵³ It means awareness of the uncertainty of one's existence precisely in the midst of what one has taken for granted, what is familiar.⁵⁴ It means always outrunning oneself, overshooting our abilities, our experiences, our thoughts.⁵⁵ It means always a certain dissatisfaction, a wanting more and more, as well as wanting something different from what one has or has achieved.⁵⁶ It means a "consciousness of our own powerlessness", aware that we demand far more from the world and from ourselves than we are able to produce.⁵⁷ It means a quest for security and stability which is itself deadening, and ultimately unattainable.

In every philosophical act of knowing, the mind is catapulted out of its familiar world to the 'unfamiliar' horizon of being. In the same moment, however, the knowing subject is directed back to

⁵²Ibid., p. 14.

⁵³Ibid., p. 19f.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 20.

⁵⁷Ibid.

the things of sense, but these meanwhile have become 'unfamiliar', precisely because of the return of thought from its adventure with being.⁵⁸

It is this ecstasis and this being thrown back into the world, in the same moment, which is what Boros means by wonder. Wonder reveals in man a radical dualism which has a transcendental cause, and is the basis for an inquiry into all other human acts.

In summary to this point, we may say that death is a moment in which man can and must act, a moment which defines and conditions all other acts, a moment the nature of which can be discovered through investigation of these other acts.

Now Boros undertakes both to demonstrate a philosophical basis for his hypothesis that death is a final decision, and to show how this hypothesis sheds light on certain important and difficult theological teachings.

The logical consequences of certain contemporary investigations of human acts lend support to the notion that death is a moment of decision, indeed the first fully personal and free decision.

The act of willing.⁵⁹ Boros follows out Maurice Blondel's examination of human willing. The dualism of man's nature finds expression in his act of willing inasmuch as there is both an elemental urge or drive toward a complete positing of the self in a single act of the will, and the fact that in every accomplishment in life there is

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 15.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 26-8.

only a partial realization of what was willed. Man always wills more than he can achieve. This means that man is always out ahead of himself as long as he is alive; there is always a "not-yet" about his decisions. In every act of willing, there is this elemental urge to fulfill my being in what I will. This is the "more" which is part of man's willing. In a sense, this "more" which I will is really a desire to overtake God, which means also a desire to present myself whole or entire to the world. But this cannot happen so long as there is more for me to do. Thus, death becomes the first moment in which I can posit myself entirely in a single act of the will, where my urge to will and the full realization of that urge coincide. Boros claims that every human act of willing is a kind of "prenatal" exercise in anticipation of the full birth of personhood brought on by the moment of death.

The act of knowing.⁶⁰ Here, Boros follows the line of thought begun by Joseph Marechal. The dualism of man's nature is further expressed in every act of knowing inasmuch as knowing is both an ecstasis toward and with the objects of knowledge, a being torn away from oneself, and also a return to the self, a representation of the self to the self by way of this ecstasis. To know something is to come into relation with something that is other than myself. Every act of knowing, no matter how apparently insignificant, is in a sense being called out of oneself by being itself. There is an insatiableness about our knowing, furthermore, a curiosity that stretches to include always more

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 31-2.

than the mere object of knowledge. Ultimately, this curiosity, this desire to know aims at "God", though, of course, the name God may not arise and may even be rejected. But knowledge is also reflexive, in the sense that we come to know who and where we are by encounter with what and where we are not. Every act of knowing yields new knowledge, new awareness about ourselves. A perfect act of knowing would be a complete ecstasis toward God, an act in which at the same time we perceive and represent to ourselves what we are. Since in everyday life, our knowing takes a detour through fragmented being, through so many diverse "things", it is only in death, where we can stand outside ourselves in utter relation to being as such, that we can come to know ourselves without a detour through the fragmentary. This, indeed, is what all life is about: knowing is not, as in Plato, anamnesis (remembering) but every act of knowing is anticipatory of that final act in which we "shall know fully, even as we have been fully known."⁶¹

The acts of perception and remembrance.⁶² In this analysis, Boros follows Henri Bergson. Man's basic dualism is expressed in perceiving and remembering inasmuch as he is always able to perceive and remember more than actually is taken in and made use of, and this is due to the basic orientation of his mind to the future and the practical, as an adaptation of the organism to its survival. The act of perception is basically an act of filtering out what is not absolutely essential to

⁶¹I Cor. 13.12.

⁶²Boros, pp. 36-8.

the demands of one's immediate environment. Similarly, the brain is capable of registering every bit of information which impinges on it, but is directed, so to speak, to remember only what is of use or importance in the immediate context. If there were no filtering in our perception, or no suppression in our remembering, we would be drowned in a flood of data. The needs of this and the next moment are what determine both what we shall take in, and what we shall recall from the past. Occasionally in our experience we relax and new perceptions or old memories we thought we had long since forgotten emerge with vividness. The artist is typically one who is able to relax, who has overcome the necessity of practical thinking and who, therefore, is able to "see" another kind of world than most of us. There is one place where relaxation comes fully, where the tensions of the present and future are laid aside, and that is in death. We quote here at length from a most poignant description which Boros gives of this moment:

As though bursting from an exploding shell there arises before man the universe he has never previously perceived in its fullness, because he had until then moved about in it only as a man of action, never as a pure contemplative. Everything comes to life about him, a great surge of life carries essences and things along with it and establishes them in their true relations. At the same time the dividing line between present and past, drawn by our concentration of attention on the future, is effaced, and there is man, pure duration, in the fullness of his whole life. The past, which had lain in him like a motionless block of ice, thaws out and comes to life. This is the birth of the mind to its full possession of the world and to its own totality. Thus, in the act of death, the universe rises up in its full stature, and man enters into possession of his own undivided life. Out of his essential nature, now posited in its integrality, he can, now and only now, make his integral decision.⁶³

⁶³Ibid., p. 41.

That decision, Boros will say later, is whether or not to yield to this movement and thus be carried along with it to one's own destiny by the flow of being.⁶⁴

The act of loving.⁶⁵ Boros follows Gabriel Marcel in this analysis. The dualism of human nature is revealed in the act of loving, in the tension between having and being. Existence is always corporeal, that is takes the shape of concrete bodies. Yet, being is always also "being-with," that is being in relationship. Being finds a kind of security in the having which is typical of corporeity, but can only come to fulfillment in giving up this security, indeed, giving up the self for the sake of the other. This is love: surrender of what one is wholly for the sake of the other. In giving up, without conditions, I also receive, and what I receive is "I"; being as "being with" comes as a pure gift and only as gift. For the most part, however, all of us live at the level of self-serving. When in those rare experiences of deep love, where the whole of ourselves is exposed and surrendered, we are able to give ourselves for the sake of another, we nevertheless fall almost immediately back into ourselves, into self-serving. It is scarcely tolerable in this life to remain long exposed. Yet, seeking security in the having of ourselves, we limit and stunt growth. Strangely, to "have" is to die; but to give up, that is, to love, is also a being susceptible to death, utter exposure of the soul, and yet this is

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 80.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 42ff.

precisely the way to life. In death, this exposure is complete, and only in death. For then the soul cannot return to the body, its normal habitat. The soul no longer "has" anything, and in this radical exposure, it too, in some sense, dies. In this moment, because it gives itself up in this radical exposure, for the first time new possibilities of being emerge. So the experiences of love here, now, no matter how fleeting, are intimations of what death will mean: an exposure or surrender that leads to new being precisely in the moment when death is said to come.

Boros concludes his analysis of various human acts of consciousness and what they reveal about the nature of death by drawing attention to two observations on the nature of human life. While these observations do not carry the full weight of his argument for a hypothesis of a final decision, and appear on the surface to resemble the usual kind of argument for immortality (namely, argument by extension), they are offered by way of corroborating what has already been suggested in the four previous analyses.

The first observation is that there are two dimensions of life which are often referred to as external and internal, soul or body, which might be understood as one rising and one falling curve, each of which seem to approach each other and intersect at death.⁶⁶ The one curve represents the physical powers of life which seem ever to fall, and to fail, the longer a man lives. The other curve represents the

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 48ff.

"spiritual" or personal powers of man which seem to expand with age. As an infant, then a child and a youth, a man's physical prowess always outstretches his wisdom. In adulthood, when the energies and abilities have reached their peak and have begun to fade, when a man realizes that many of his projects and dreams will not be brought to fulfillment, a man's intellectual and spiritual acumen seems to outstretch his ability to act. If death represents, on the one hand, the zenith of the physical resources, might it not also be the apex of his self-awareness and spiritual development? This is the position that Boros takes: there is reason to suppose that precisely this is the case. We take this argument to be different from the typical argument that immortality, life after death, is required in order to fulfill or make life meaningful. What death is, is a moment of self-presence and a moment of self-surrender. We believe this description of the rising curve of spirituality, wisdom, is intelligible and helpful.

Boros' second observation is that the process of daily living is a process of individuation or "crystallization", a process that leads from the utter dependence of the embryo on its environment, to a sense of self built up out of the experiences of joy and sorrow, mastery and pain, give and take that constitute everyday life.⁶⁷ This is a process of creativity, and of increasing freedom; creativity in the sense of making something unique out of all the possibilities present to the

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 55ff.

person, freedom in the sense of free to be oneself, free to bring off the project of one's own life.⁶⁸ Of course, this freedom and creativity are not absolute, for a man always has to deal with what he has been given in his particular situation. But the process Boros points to is nevertheless a real and dynamic one. The significance of this process for an understanding of death is that the very essence of this dynamism is a continuous laying aside of what one has achieved for the sake of what one has yet to bring about. In a sense, all previous experiences and relationships must be superseded in order for the process to continue. The final laying aside is, of course, death. This stage in the process is important for it consummates what one has crystallized, it brings to an end all the experiences and relationships which are the material out of which one has made himself. But it is important also for the fact that one lays them aside in order to take a new position in relation to the world. This new relation is death itself. One lays aside the relationships he has achieved with his body and the world for the sake of his "eternal destiny." Recalling that Boros understands death as a moment of decision which has consequences for one's eternal destiny, we can admit a certain inconclusiveness as to exactly what may be meant by "eternal destiny"; Boros leaves the future open in this respect. It is clear, however, that he has in mind more than the notion that we leave this earthly body behind to take up a new one in heaven above. Again, Boros is attempting a theology of death itself, and not of an after-life. So death is a moment of consummation, a crowning of

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 59ff.

all that a man is, a confirmation of his uniqueness before God and in relation to the rest of the world; but it is also a moment in which, just as in life, he lays aside what he has put together so far, in order to receive or to fashion what he has yet to be.

Having concluded the philosophical analyses, but still within the philosophical demonstration of his hypothesis, Boros draws together all the findings he has brought to light regarding the nature of death and proposes a redefinition of the process of death itself. This redefinition has the greatest consequences, in our view, for a contemporary theological approach to death, and is deserving of the most careful and ongoing reflection.

We have mentioned Boros' contention that the traditional definition of death as the separation of the soul from the body is inadequate. We have said that this kind of language reflects the tremendous transformation that death represents for the person metaphysically. Specifically what is inadequate about such a definition, however, is the fact that it gives the impression that the soul emerges from death unscathed; that it is the body alone which suffers dissolution and destruction. There is a certain unreality about such talk, for it is scarcely conceivable that the soul, the truly personal essence of what a person is, should be unchanged by the transformation brought on by death.⁶⁹ The root of this sense of unreality, however, is traceable to a misunderstanding in the development of theology since Thomas Aquinas,

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 74.

according to Boros.⁷⁰ This misunderstanding is correctable by a re-examination of Aquinas' thought.

The very nature of the soul requires a body.⁷¹ A person is not the combination of two different substances, soul and body, each of which are fully developed in themselves and brought into proximity to each other. The body is rather the "unfolding of the soul."⁷² The soul is the "form" of being as it comes to individual expression. It requires a body in order to enact itself, much as "thought" requires a "word" for its expression and its reality. This means that the destruction of the body has the most momentous consequences for the soul. It can mean nothing less than that the soul, too, undergoes a destruction of sorts. "Through death the soul finds itself transferred into a state of ontological indigence."⁷³

But if the soul is a form for the individual expression of being, one cannot say that being is destroyed with the exposure of the soul to destruction in death. This is the meaning of the traditional term "subsistent form" in relation to the soul: while the soul is exposed to destruction, it is not possible for the soul to be utterly destroyed. There appears here a contradiction, that of "the destruction of an indestructible" through which it is difficult to get and which focalizes the contemporary problem of Christian preaching on death.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 75.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., p. 76.

This apparent contradiction is what has forced most theologians either to affirm an after-life in spite of our deepest understandings of the thoroughness of death, or to take our cue from the empirical and leave behind all talk of resurrection and the soul, and the like, and center on a thoroughly historical understanding of man's life and destiny. Boros sees a new way.⁷⁴

"Ontological indigence" is the key notion here. The soul requires a body, yet death has snatched away this very thing. This represents a very significant change for the soul, such that it can hardly be thought that the soul is not affected at its root. "In death the soul is exposed to real and effective annihilation."⁷⁵ But the soul can never "fall back into nothingness," just as for body there is a radical transformation but the matter is still matter. Boros takes a hint from Karl Rahner and suggests that the soul, in this state of impoverishment now comes into a new relationship with the corporeal.⁷⁶ This time its 'body' is not a discrete human body, but all creation. The soul, far from being freed from a bodily prison to some kind of "a-cosmic" existence, assumes a "pan-cosmic" existence, Boros suggests.⁷⁷ In a sense, the soul goes directly to the "place where the world has its source."⁷⁸ The soul does not simply re-merge with this source, so to speak, or

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 78ff.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 74.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 76.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 77.

⁷⁸Ibid.

enter into it. It takes a relation with respect to this source. The soul still exercises itself in creativity and freedom, having laid aside its human form in order to assume a new relationship; in this relationship it "reshapes the whole cosmos for itself, essentially,"⁷⁹ that is, it retains its own peculiar self-understanding, is still unique. This notion does not imply that the soul becomes God, or re-merges with God, or anything like these ideas. God still stands over against the soul, all souls. In death, the soul comes to an encounter with God.⁸⁰

Here, then, is the three-fold definition of what the process of death is: the soul comes to encounter itself in its poverty, in the possibility of its own annihilation; it passes over into a full encounter with the world, a relationship which was always contained in each individual act of the soul, but which becomes actualized only in death; and the soul comes face to face with God "who has ever been present to (it) as the end (it was) seeking," not in the 'beatific vision' of God, but in the moment of decision, the final decision.⁸¹

Boros frankly admits to the difficulties of expressing what is a complex and often paradoxical understanding of death. Yet, we must not miss the freshness and depth of insight with which he presents his hypothesis. Death is the aim of all human action, not simply in the fact that a man will die sometime, but much more because all human acts are constituted by death, seek the fullness of themselves as acts that

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 79.

⁸⁰Ibid., 79f.

⁸¹Ibid.

only death can grant. Death is not an event that affects only a part of man, but which threatens him in his essential wholeness, and which radically transforms him, body and soul. Death brings man abruptly into relationship with himself, the world (all that is), and God and seeks for a decision, but this encounter is foreshadowed in all previous acts and decisions and is of a piece with his own unique way of putting the world together. Death poses to man this final decision as a decision regarding his eternal destiny:

Being flows towards him like a boundless stream of things, meanings, persons and happenings, ready to convey him right into the Godhead. Yes, God himself stretches out his hand for him; God, who in every stirring of his existence, had been in him as his deepest mystery, from the stuff of which he had always been forming himself; God who had ever been driving him on towards an eternal destiny. There now man stands, free to accept or reject this splendour. In a last, final decision he either allows this flood of realities to flow past him, while he stands there eternally turned to stone, like a rock past which the life-giving stream flows on, noble enough in himself no doubt, but abandoned and eternally alone; or he allows himself to be carried along by this flood, becomes part of it and flows on into eternal fulfillment.⁸²

This perspective on death is achieved, furthermore, without relinquishing the Christian hope for a death that is meaningful, that is not the simple annihilation of all that is worthwhile about the person, that, as the 'enemy' of which the New Testament speaks, has been finally overcome. Yet it does this without also falling into gross literalizing that focuses on some kind of after-life of disembodied spirits. This perspective holds fast to the reality of historical, lived experience. It grows out of an analysis of everyday life that takes its processes and its end seriously. But precisely in this taking seriously the life

⁸²Ibid., p. ix.

of everyday man, it is able to find a ground for the affirmations of faith in relation to death.

Boros turns a considerable amount of attention to the way in which his hypothesis of a final decision in death sheds light on several difficult questions in "speculative theology." The questions he deals with are such as the doctrine of original sin, and the descent of Christ into hell. The major stumbling block for the Protestant preacher in approaching this section of Boros' profound work is precisely its speculativeness; its language seems to have been borrowed from another time and place (which of course it was), and seems to cause more problems than it solves. We will not here give a full account of his treatment of these questions, but we feel that it is essential to glimpse at least what he does with the Christological formulations in relation to his hypothesis. The formulations on which he focuses are: the death of Christ, his descent into hell, his resurrection and his ascension.

The Church from earliest times taught that the death of Christ is the act which effects salvation. To concentrate on Christ's perfect obedience to God as that which brings about the possibility of salvation, as has been done repeatedly in more pragmatic theological systems, does not change anything, for the New Testament understanding of Christ's obedience is that he was in fact obedient unto death. It seems, then, that we must understand how the death of Christ can be said to have brought about salvation.⁸³

⁸³Ibid., p. 141.

In the first place, the death of Christ presupposes his complete humanity, including not only the importance of his bodily presence through which alone God acts in Christ, but also the necessity that he should "progress," develop, grow, in and into his humanity through the same kinds of acts which we have so far described.⁸⁴ This means that death was as present in every act of Christ, and that he sought in every act the same type of completion or fulfillment that is true of every ordinary man. We must here recall the doctrine of the hypostatic union of Christ with God. Christ retains his divinity, and thus his choosing death has consequences for the whole world, all creation, every man. Yet, this fact does not change the necessity of Christ's choosing death. It is in the choice of death that Christ becomes really, fully human. It is here he achieves his perfection. And if he is to be the instrument through which God acts, he becomes the perfect instrument as he becomes perfectly, fully human.⁸⁵

A little more clarity may be achieved here by means of Father Aidan Kavanagh's remark on the centrality of Christ's death in the effecting of salvation: "Christ underwent and embraced death. . .it is the center and apogee of all his deeds."⁸⁶ This means that because he faced death "squarely and actively," it is now possible, even mandatory

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 144.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 148.

⁸⁶Aidan Kavanagh, "Death and Life in Christ," Thesis Theological Cassettes, V:2 (March 1972).

for every one of us to do so.⁸⁷ The divine Christ chooses humanity as the way to effect salvation; but choosing humanity means also re-integrating death, or perceiving how integral death (and its correlatives, disease, limitation, finitude, failure) is to the human project.⁸⁸

So Christ is at once the pioneer of humanity, plunging into and showing the way through death, and the paradigm for all other deaths, the model which we should all follow in the conduct of our individual lives. Both "pioneer" and "paradigm" are closely related notions; they are caught in Boros' use of the traditional term viator in reference to Christ.⁸⁹ Christ has set the way before us. But there is a second way in which the bodily death of Christ effects salvation, according to Boros.

This second way recalls to mind the redefinition Boros gave to the process of death above, namely the passing over of the soul from a discrete body to a pan-cosmic body.⁹⁰ In death, Christ assumed a new relation to the whole of reality. Inasmuch as his nature far surpasses the nature of the ordinary man (he still retains his divinity), this relationship is far more radical, goes deeper to the root of reality, so

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Boros, p. 144.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 149.

to speak, than would be possible for any other man in his death. In this way, Christ achieves a relationship to all men.⁹¹ Just as his bodily presence was God's instrument on earth, so now his pan-cosmic body is the way in which he presents himself to all men, and the way through which their salvation is wrought. Some may object that the presence of Christ is not bodily, but spiritual. This is drawing distinctions that should not be drawn. The spiritual is a mode of the bodily contact.⁹² That is to say, faith as a spiritual response or contact with Christ is only one of the ways in which the person expresses himself. If we recall that the person is really a body-soul, not a combination of two distinct substances, we may say that spiritual contact (faith) is but a mode of bodily contact. The point of Christ's bodily contact is important, in Boros' estimation, because it provides a means for explicating the doctrine that Christ's bodily death effects salvation for all men.⁹³

In partial answer to the question, "How does Christ's death effect salvation?", we may answer: (1) it sets the way for man to achieve his completion before him, and the way is characterized by an embracing of death in life; (2) through his own death, Christ passes over into a relationship with all men which is real and present.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid., p. 147f.

⁹³Ibid., p. 148.

It is now possible to understand in essence how the doctrines of the descent into hell, the resurrection and the ascension are to be understood. In the descent into hell, Christ moves into the world in a way that has consequences beyond those just outlined: (1) he descends into the "underworld" (hell) in order to redeem, or re-integrate even this part of the world into the overall design of the divine will; (2) in his descent, Christ destroys the principalities and powers, that is all those powers and their results which stand opposed to the divine intent. The "descent" is a spatial symbol for a metaphysical reality.⁹⁴ In the resurrection, Christ's presence is made available to the believer in the form of a "growing together with him". It now makes sense to speak of the Church as the body of Christ beyond a mere remembrance of him in the cultic acts.⁹⁵ Christ avails himself in a living relationship that is, mysterious, yes, but not supernatural in the traditional way of thinking. In the ascension, again a spatial symbol, Christ is elevated to that place which Teilhard describes as the point omega, the goal of the world as it evolves in history, as it is drawn to a meeting with the divine intention.⁹⁶ In sum, then, "Christ's fourfold and single act: death, descent, resurrection and ascension, by means of which he accomplished our redemption has reshaped the whole cosmos

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 161.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 158ff.

christologically and made of it an instrument of the Godhead (instrumentum divinitatis).⁹⁷

So, death is not only a natural phenomenon, nor even an event or act which is constitutive of human life as such. It is also the event in the life of Christ which becomes efficacious for man's salvation, that is, his wholeness or spiritual integration; and it is what Boros calls the primary "sacramental situation", the place of man's encounter with Christ.⁹⁸ As Father Kavanagh notes, this means nothing less than that the Christian faith "places death at the beginning of the Christian life," and that death is "not a future but a past event."⁹⁹ The Christian realizes that "he or she is alive because dying has been done: its techniques have been mastered, its results have been celebrated, and its furtherance has been constantly exploited."¹⁰⁰ Death and dying "have been done", have been conquered in the Christ and in the generations of Christians who have followed him. Death is the very essence of "conversion, catechesis, and initiation" in the Christian tradition. In order to understand this, one need only point to Paul's understanding of baptism as a dying and rising with Christ, or the meaning of the Lord's Supper as a celebration of the centrality of death, even the death of a single man, in making life whole. These are enough to show that the

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 163.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 164.

⁹⁹Kavanagh.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

Christian understands death quite differently from others in the world, and that, far from being an intrusion from the outskirts of existence, an interruption which, while necessary, is to be avoided at all costs, death is the "adamant core of Christian existence."¹⁰¹

Conclusion

We have seen how three theologies approach death. In Kaufman, the "liberal" concentration on human, historical experience directs our attention really away from the end to an affirmation of the meaning of life here and now. Death may draw the individual's life to a close, but it cannot on that account be said to have rendered it meaningless or futile. Man's life is hid with God. In history, where God acts, each man plays a vital role. The resurrection of Christ is itself proof that a single life and death may be used by God to achieve remarkable results. If this is so, then truly "death shall have no dominion." Even so, we observed, such an approach leaves a certain ambiguity about exactly what it is a person is to hope for.

In Aldwinckle, the "conservative" concentration on the preservation of doctrinal formulations directs our attention really beyond the end to an affirmation of a continued existence after death. Jesus both taught such a doctrine himself and gave evidence of its validity in his resurrection which, despite all critical-historical research, can be

¹⁰¹Ibid.

affirmed as actually, physically true by the believer. Of course, there is an uncertainty as to exactly what this after-life will be like. We are entitled to say that it will be radically different from this life, yet we can also say that we will be aware of ourselves there, and presumably will be able to recognize others as well. Here we observed that such an approach seems, ultimately, to fail to take account of precisely those questions which call such formulations into doubt in the first place. We saw that such an approach probably does not restore the confidence it wants desperately to protect.

In Boros, we found an approach which defies characterization with respect to "liberal" or "conservative." It sought to take seriously actual lived experience by following out certain lines of philosophical investigation. It combined the findings from these with certain doctrinal formulations of the most difficult sort. The marriage that resulted yielded the following insights: (1) Death is contained in every individual act a man performs. If he will, he may direct his attention to these acts and discover how the fulfillment which they achieve only fragmentarily but toward which they ever strive is possible only in death. (2) Death itself becomes a moment of decision in which a man fulfills all that he is and can be. (3) The outcome of this decision is foreshadowed by the previous acts themselves. (4) In Christ we see what it means to embrace death: the yielding of oneself to God in trust, the owning of one's own finitude, the risking of oneself in love, the laying aside of what one has achieved in order to receive the new, all these responses, which are part of what it means to embrace death, are precisely what opens up the possibility of new life.

We hold that Boros' approach to death is the more encompassing, the more cogent, and the more faithful representation and explication of the Christian understanding and hope.

Chapter 5

THE DEMONSTRATION: I CORINTHIANS 15:35-58

TEXT SELECTION

Though many New Testament texts would be appropriate for an exegetical study and application to the problem of death, we have chosen I Corinthians 15:35-58. The text was chosen for several reasons.

First, it is central to the message of the New Testament in general. We shall show below how the text is related to the New Testament and to the overall concern of the particular book in which it occurs. Here we may observe that this particular text has been the object of study by many Christian writers and preachers who have dealt with the problem of death, both in ancient times and in the present. As examples, we could cite Clement of Alexandria who made reference to this text in both his Stromata and Instructor; Athenagoras quotes parts of it in his treatise On the Resurrection of the Dead; Irenaeus makes numerous references to parts or all of the text in his Against Heresies, especially Book V; Origen refers to some 18 passages in his Against Celsus in Book V; and Tertullian quotes over 25 times from this text in On the Resurrection of the Flesh, and over 23 times in Against Marcion. It seems that this text provides a rich quarry for every contemporary theologian, too.¹

¹By our own count; we used Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

Second, this text is thoroughly representative of New Testament themes and motifs relating to death, resurrection, and Christian hope.

Third, the text is extensive enough to allow depth treatment.

Fourth, the text is diverse enough to allow many applications and suggest many possibilities for preaching.

Fifth, and perhaps one of the most important points, the text demonstrates great internal unity which makes it possible to follow through a single sustained argument with a view to discovering a significant theological idea or set of ideas.

Sixth, the text seems to set its own limits. The major NT texts which we consulted all show it as a distinct unit within the book as a whole.² Further confirmation of the limits is found in the outlines proposed by the introductory works on the book,³ and the breakdown given by the commentaries here used as major resources.⁴

²Westcott and Hort (1951); Nestle (1963); Nestle and Kirkpatrick (1958). Entered in Bibliography under Bible.

³Paul Feine, Johannes Behm, and Werner G. Kümmel, Introduction to the New Testament (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966); Robert M. Grant, A Historical Introduction to the New Testament (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Willi Marxsen, Introduction to the New Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

⁴Clarence T. Craig, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians: Exposition," in Interpreter's Bible Commentary (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951), X:pp. 243-54; William Baird, The Corinthian Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964); Hans Conzelmann, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

THE TEXT IN CONTEXT

The Text in the Book.

In order to place the text properly in context, we must first observe the problem of the authenticity and integrity of the book as a whole. There is little controversy attached to the Pauline authorship of I Corinthians.⁵ Most authorities further agree that, based on the account of Paul's travels in Acts, I Corinthians must have been written from Ephesus somewhere between AD 52 and 55.⁶ Thus we may assert the authenticity of the letter. The integrity of I Corinthians has, however, been seriously questioned on the basis of indications within it of a previous letter written to the Corinthians by Paul. Attempts have been made to reconstruct the first letter from the present Corinthian correspondence. Recent scholarship has tended to view the ingenious "re-constructions" as arbitrary and unnecessary.⁷ Our introductions regard the letter as a whole work and consider it as is.

Of the many outlines of the book offered by recent scholars, that of Willi Marxsen is the easiest to handle:⁸

⁵Marxsen, p. 71; Feine, Behm and Kümmel, p. 205; Grant, p. 171f.

⁶Marxsen, p. 71; Geine, p. 205; Grant, p.

⁷Feine, p. 204.

⁸Marxsen, p. 72.

Introduction:	1.1 - 9	Greetings and thanksgiving.
Section 1:	1.10 - 4.21	Divisions in the Church.
Section 2:	5.1 - 6.20	Scandals in the Church.
Section 3:	7.1 - 11.34	Questions from the Church.
Section 4:	12.1 - 14.40	Worship in the Church.
Section 5:	15.1 - 58	The questions concerning Resurrection.
Section 6:	16.1 - 24	Paul's plans: collection, travels, exhortations, and greetings.

The book deals with two overarching concerns: the first has to do with the practical problems of Church life; the second has to do with basic understandings of the Christian faith. The questions relating to resurrection are integral to both types of concerns.

In the first category are questions having to do with the relation of the Christian community to the secular world around it (law-suits, 6.1; general relations, 5.10; whether meat offered to idols, sometimes the only kind offered for sale in the market-place, can be eaten by Christians, 10.25 ff.); the relation of Christian to Christian, (in court, 6.1,5; family relations, 5.1-5, 7.3-13; unmarried persons, 7.25-40; towards the 'weaker' brother, 8; towards the larger Christian community, 16.1-4); Christian worship (headcoverings, 11.4-5; the common meal, 11.33; orderliness, 14).

In the second category, it is clear that Paul must deal with certain divisions in the church at Corinth. It is not at all clear, however, that Paul understands these divisions adequately. In 1.12, Paul seems to identify four distinct groups, or "parties" as they have been traditionally called. Some scholars attempted in the past to reconstruct the positions of these parties in detail, assuming the "Cephas" group to be basically Jewish-Christian in nature, the "Apollos"

group to be a kind of Christian wisdom circle, the "Christ" group to be Gnostic in nature, and the "Paul" group to be made up of those adhering to Paul's form of preaching and theology.⁹ Yet, Jewish-Christian ideas and questions seem conspicuously absent from the letter,¹⁰ and from Paul's own words (16.12) it hardly appears that Apollos is the leader of a rival band ("Apollos our brother").¹¹ On the other hand, given the predominance of certain anti-Gnostic elements found throughout the letter (e.g., use of Gnostic terms in order to refute them; gnosis, 8.1; pneumatikoi, 15.46ff.; and the charismata of the Spirit, chs. 12 and 14; also the playing down of certain 'Pauline' concepts which might play into the hands of the Gnostics: ἀγαθός, δίκαιος are missing; little attention given to 'justification by faith') it seems clear that there was a definite Gnostic presence in the Corinthian congregation.¹² Given the Gnostic tendency to disregard the preaching of the "crucified Christ" and their tendency to disconnect the Christian life from the concrete reality of daily living, Paul feels it doubly necessary to concentrate on the suffering of Christ as well as his sovereignty, and the embodied nature of Christian existence right up to and including the resurrection.

⁹Feine, Behm and Klümmel, p. 203f.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Marxsen, p. 72.

¹²Grant, p. 181.

Now the discussion which Paul puts forward of the resurrection in chapter 15 partakes in both of these overall concerns. It has practical consequences for the Christian community: the denial of Christ's resurrection means that the whole Christian enterprise is a vain one (15.19). Moreover, the preaching of the resurrection means an empowering of the Christians to live and work with renewed vigor in the world (15.58). But undoubtedly the Great Divide between those who have it right (the other three 'parties'?) is the ability to affirm "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies" (L5.36); that is to say, because the real Christian can affirm the real death of Christ, and thus also yield himself up even to death, he is ready also to understand and affirm the resurrection appropriately. Thus, the text under study is fully interrelated with the rest of the book of I Corinthians.

The Text in the Chapter

In the chapter in which our text occurs, we find an extended and complicated set of arguments in support of the resurrection. A rapid analysis of this immediate context will help us understand the text even more clearly.

Paul begins his arguments for resurrection by grounding his understanding of this event in the resurrection of Christ (15.1-11). According to Paul, the resurrection is a thoroughly historical event, though, of course, the exact details of this event are not to be had. Paul makes no mention of the empty tomb in support of the historicity of Christ's resurrection. The historical nature of the resurrection is important for the further development of his arguments. In the next

section (vss. 12-19), for example, Paul goes on to point out the consequences for denying the resurrection: (1) if Christ is not raised, then the preaching of Christ is in vain--precisely that preaching which was indicated in the tradition Paul had "received" (παράλαμβάνς) and which he "delivered" (παράδωκεν)--that is, the whole preaching enterprise would have to be given up; (2) if Christ is not raised, this would amount to a rejection of the gospel as a whole, the very gospel which has brought them the power of salvation (1.7; Ro. 1.16). On the positive side, (vss. 20-28) it may be confidently proclaimed the Christ has been raised from the dead, and this foreshadows great things to come: Christ is the "first fruits", the sign of a coming great harvest (vs. 20); Christ is himself the presence of resurrection (vs. 21); Christ is the one who will overcome the death brought on in Adam (vs. 22); with Christ's appearing (παρουσία) all of human history will reveal itself as subject to God's purposes (vss. 24ff.). Finally, a few miscellaneous arguments are given for the resurrection (vss. 29-34): the Corinthian practice of baptizing for the sake of the dead indicates some kind of conception of resurrection (vs. 29); Paul's personal experience indicates his confidence to risk life itself because death is not the last word (vss. 30-31); those who reject the resurrection are likely to become like those who spout familiar pagan slogans (vs. 33). Paul exhorts his readers to get back in line with the tradition, and what they know to be true of their own experience: resurrection is equivalent to having knowledge of God, and the rejection of it is a matter of shame for the Corinthians (vs. 34).

This brings us to the brink of our text. Now Paul will take up the specific questions related to the nature of the resurrection, questions which also, of course, involve a concept of the nature of death.

The Text and the New Testament

Ernst Käsemann also believes the theme of resurrection developed by Paul in chapter 15 to be the key theme of the whole work.¹³ He goes on, however, to show how this theme is related to the New Testament as a whole. He characterizes this relationship in three points: (1) The New Testament theology of resurrection starts and stays with "Jesus' sovereignty." It is based christologically, not soteriologically or anthropologically.¹⁴ Only as one adheres to Jesus in his daily discipleship can one speak appropriately of resurrection. It is not a general "truth," or an idyl "doctrine". In Paul's speaking of the foolishness of worldly wisdom over against the true wisdom of God's elect, he gives emphasis to the necessity of the resurrection showing up in the Christian's daily surrendering to his Lord; what looks like foolishness to the world, or a scandal to the nominally religious turns out to be a life-giving reality. (2) A right theology of resurrection is also and at the same time a theology of cross-bearing.¹⁵ It means the embracing of suffering and death as a part of existence, a part through which

¹³Ernst Käsemann, Jesus Means Freedom (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972).

¹⁴Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁵Ibid.

God's intention and freeing spirit is seen and grasped. "Anyone who tones this down does not know that the resurrection, like birth, is a painful thing. . .His theology of resurrection remains, at least on earth, a dream."¹⁶ Paul gives emphasis to precisely this understanding through the text in question, and especially at its end. (3) The theology of resurrection means freedom.¹⁷ This is not a freedom that is to be used for self-serving, nor is it taken up in pious activity. Self-serving is a dead-end street. Piety is often a protection against the new, the different, the threatening. But resurrection points the way to a God who makes all things new. And the only adequate response to such a God is self-surrender, a yielding in trust to the new thing he is doing in life (and death). "The resurrection of the dead means a new world, and therefore creates a being who will no longer resign himself to the old conditions that now prevail upon the earth."¹⁸ This non-resignation to the present conditions does not, of course, mean flight from this world, but by God's grace a renewed commitment to living in the world. Paul specifically repudiates any interpretation of his message which would indicate flight from the world, even though the world may be "immoral" (5-9, 10). Instead, he counsels staying put (7.17), and staying active (15.1-2, 58). And this is precisely the way to freedom: having "borne the image of the man of dust"--with all his infirmities, failures, and longings--"we shall also bear the image of

¹⁶Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

the man of heaven"--the perfect, spiritual, free man (15.49).

We have seen then, how this passage is part of a work by Paul, how it fits integrally in the outline of the book, how its ideas relate to those found elsewhere in the book, and how it rehearses themes common to the New Testament.

INDICATIONS AFFECTING THE MEANING OF THE TEXT

The Form

The form of our text is a "loose diatribe."¹⁹ It opens in v. 35 with the raising of two questions. The questions may be regarded as rhetorical in nature, a figure of speech, provided (1) this is not taken to mean that they are mere devices for raising false issues, and (2)

this is not taken as prejudicing the case against the possibility that these questions represent ones that were actually raised in the Corinthian community. We simply do not know enough about the Corinthian situation to say whether these questions are advanced by Paul for discussion or whether they are presented to him.²⁰ Perelman observes that the argumentative value of a figure of speech will depend on whether it "brings about a change in perspective and its use seems normal in relation to this new situation."²¹ The perspective in the text does change

¹⁹Conzelmann, p. 280.

²⁰Feine, Behm, and Kümmel, p. 200.

²¹Ch. Perelman, and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), p. 169.

the instant the questions in v. 35 are raised, changes, that is, in relation to the context. Until now the arguments have seemed quite logical and, except for Paul's reference to himself in vv. 30-32, quite impersonal. With the questions, we are brought into an abrupt imaginary dialogue. The effect of this change is to create "presence", that is to heighten the sense of the urgency of the matter under discussion. This is precisely the chief characteristic of the use of figures of speech.²²

Other figures include: (1) definition, where this is not intended to give technical information but to focus on particular aspects which serve to create presence (v. 37; v. 56);²³ (2) enallage of persons a figure which creates presence by placing the reader in the situation which the writer creates (cf. v. 36f. and vv. 42 ff: in the first case, the reader is directly involved, but in the second we have a more impersonal statement of the nature of the resurrection such as would normally be appropriate);²⁴ (3) repetition, (vv. 42b. ff.: sown...raised; vv. 38 ff. body);²⁵ (4) personification, direct address (v. 55 "O death...");²⁶ (5) enallage of tense, which creates presence

²²Ibid., p. 167ff.

²³Ibid., p. 172.

²⁴Ibid., p. 178.

²⁵Ibid., p. 174f.

²⁶Ibid., p. 176.

through changes in normal verb-tense (vv. 42ff. speaks of a future event, but in the present tense; it is the same for v. 54);²⁷ (6) possibly the quotation in v. 45 is a figure, but in order to qualify it cannot be used to buttress an argument by appeal to authority, but is used to increase a sense of "communion."²⁸ The difference is slight but may be shown by contrasting this verse (and also the quote in v. 54, 55) with the use of the tradition formula in v. 3 ff. There, the concern is to draw attention to an established teaching which will add weight to the argument that Christ is raised. In the present text, the quotations are fully integrated in the course of the argumentation and draw very little attention to themselves as "proof texts". We shall indicate below how, in fact, the quotation in v. 45 is raised in order for it to become a term in an analogy.²⁹

The text before us, then, is filled with rhetorical figures the intention of all of which is to increase the sense of urgency and presence of the arguments for resurrection. These are more vivid, by and large, than the other arguments advanced so far in the chapter, and steadily increase in intensity toward the end of our text. So intense is this achievement of presence that one commentator merely reproduces the section from v. 51 onward as "poetry", and allows it to carry its own power to interpret to the reader.³⁰

²⁷Ibid., p. 177.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹See section 5 below.

³⁰Baird, p. 190.

Textual Variants

We cannot here consider all the problems related to evaluating the variant readings of the text before.. We should point out, however, that there appear to be remarkably few variations in the way the text reads. Westcott and Hort, Nestle, and Nestle and Kirkpatrick all reproduce the same text. Nestle indicates in the apparatus only a couple of potentially important variations. The first is found in v. 49, where the first person plural, future indicative of $\varphi\omicron\rho\epsilon\omega$ is changed to a first aorist subjunctive in P46, D, G, and the Textus Receptus. According to Dana and Mantey, the change in tense and mood would not substantially alter the meaning of the passage, these having to be read against the controlling $\epsilon\varphi\omicron\rho\epsilon\sigma\alpha\mu\epsilon\nu$ in the first part of the verse.³¹

The only other significant variant occurs in v. 51. Here three possibilities emerge as indicated by the Nestle apparatus:³²

- the present text reads: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. (B, Textus Receptus, most syriac and egyptian)
- the first variant would be: We shall all sleep, but we shall not all be changed. (χ , C; also A, G)
- the second variant would be: we shall all be raised, but we shall not all be changed, (D*, Marcion).

The shifting of negative statements to positive, and vice versa, is a potentially important change. However, in the present context, it would

³¹H. E. Dana, and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of New Testament Greek (New York: Macmillan, 1927), pp. 170, 195.

³²Bible, Novum Testamentum Graece (New York: American Bible Society, 1963), pp. 454-455.

hardly make sense to assert "We shall all sleep, but we shall not be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, etc." The last possibility would make sense, but demands another theological viewpoint in order to count as a significant argument in the present context. Therefore, both variations can be dismissed in favor of the text as we have it.

Setting in Life

We are not faced in this text with an obscure situation the exact determination of which is crucial for the interpretation. Clearly Paul is presenting a series of arguments to clarify his understanding, which he takes to be normative (v.3 ff.), of the resurrection. This statement is not weakened by calling attention to the fact that the exact nature of the "parties," if such there are in the Corinthian Church cannot be determined. Conjectures have been made as to the "presenting problem" which raised the question of the resurrection in its form in this text.³³ No successful answer has been definitively given.³⁴ That this is so indicates that the interpreter should use due caution in concluding that Paul is engaged in polemic only. As Conzelmann assures us, it is the positive import of Paul's arguments which is of the greatest significance for interpreting this passage.³⁵

³³Baird, pp. 163-65.

³⁴Feine, Behm, and Kümmel, p. 202.

³⁵Conzelmann, p. 287.

STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF THE TEXT

- (35) ἀλλὰ ἔρεϊ τις·
 πῶς ἐγείρονται οἱ νεκροί;
 ποῖω δὲ σώματι ἔρχονται;
- (36) ἄφρων,
 οὐδ' οὐ σπείρεις, οὐ ζωοποιεῖται
 ἔτι μὴ ἀποθάνῃ·
- (37) καὶ ὁ σπείρεις,
 οὐ τὸ σῶμα τὸ γενησόμενον σπείρεις,
 ἀλλὰ γυμνὸν κόκκον
 εἰ τύχοι σίτου ἢ τινὸς τῶν λοιπῶν·
- (38) ὁ δὲ θεὸς δίδωσιν αὐτῷ σῶμα
 καθὼς ἠθέλησεν,
 καὶ ἐκάστω τῶν σπερμάτων ἴδιον σῶμα.
- (39) οὐ πᾶσα σὰρξ ἡ αὐτὴ σὰρξ,
 ἀλλὰ ἄλλη μὲν ἀνθρώπων,
 ἄλλη δὲ σὰρξ κτηνῶν,
 ἄλλη δὲ σὰρξ πτηνῶν,
 ἄλλη δὲ ἰχθύων.
- (40) καὶ σώματα ἐπουράνια
 καὶ σώματα ἐπίγεια·
 ἄλλα ἑτέρα μὲν ἢ τῶν ἐπουρανίων δόξα,
 ἑτέρα δὲ ἢ τῶν ἐπιγείων.
- (41) ἄλλη δόξα ἡλίου,
 καὶ ἄλλη δόξα σελήνης,

καὶ ἄλλη δόξα ἀστέρων·

ἀστὴρ γὰρ ἀστέρος διαφέρει ἐν δόξῃ.

(42) οὕτως καὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν.

σπείρεται ἐν φθορᾷ,

ἐγείρεται ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ·

(43) σπείρεται ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ,

ἐγείρεται ἐν δόξῃ·

σπείρεται ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ,

ἐγείρεται ἐν δυνάμει·

(44) σπείρεται σῶμα ψυχικόν,

ἐγείρεται σῶμα πνευματικόν.

εἰ ἔστιν σῶμα ψυχικόν,

ἔστι καὶ πνευματικόν.

(45) οὕτως καὶ γέγραπται·

ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ἀδάμ

εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν·

ὁ ἔσχατος ἀδάμ

εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν.

(46) ἀλλ' οὐ πρῶτον τὸ πνευματικόν ἀλλὰ τὸ ψυχικόν,

ἔπειτα τὸ πνευματικόν.

(47) ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γῆς χοῖνός,

ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος ἐκ οὐρανοῦ.

(48) οἷος ὁ χοῖνος,

τοιούτοι καὶ οἱ χοῖνοί,

καὶ οἷος ὁ ἐπουράνιος,

τοιούτοι καὶ οἱ ἐπουράνιοι·

- (49) καὶ καθὼς ἐφορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοῦκοῦ,
φορέσαμεν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανίου.
- (50) τοῦτο δέ φημι, ἀδελφοί,
ὅτι σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα βασιλείαν θεοῦ
κληρονομήσαι οὐ δύναται,
οὐδὲ ἡ φθορὰ τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν κληρονομεῖ.
- (51) ἰδοὺ
μυστήριον ὑμῖν λέγω·
πάντες οὐ κοιμηθησόμεθα,
πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγησόμεθα,
- (52) ἐν ἀτόμῳ,
ἐν ῥιπῇ ὀφθαλμοῦ,
ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ σάλπιγγι·
σαλπείσει γὰρ,
καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐγερθήσονται ἄφθαρτοι,
καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀλλαγησόμεθα.
- (53) δεῖ γὰρ τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσασθαι ἀφθαρσίαν
καὶ τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσασθαι ἀθανασίαν.
- (54) ὅταν δὲ τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσῃται ἀφθαρσίαν
καὶ τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσῃται ἀθανασίαν,
τότε γενήσεται ὁ λόγος ὁ γεγραμμένος·
κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς νῆκος;
- (55) ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ νῆκος;
ποῦ σου, θάνατε, τὸ κέντρον;
- (56) τὸ δὲ κέντρον τοῦ θανάτου ἡ ἁμαρτία,
ἡ δὲ δύναμις τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ νόμος·

(57) τῷ δὲ θεῷ χάρις

τῷ δίδόντι ἡμῖν τὸ νῦν

διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

(58) ὦστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί,

ἐδραῖοι γίνεσθε,

ἀμετακίνητοι,

περισεύοντες ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ τοῦ κυρίου πάντοτε,

εἰδότες ὅτι

ὁ κόπος ὑμῶν οὐκ ἔστιν κενὸς ἐν κυρίῳ.

THE DYNAMICS OF THE TEXT

According to Conzelmann, the text may be divided into four parts, each part giving arguments in support of the notion that the resurrection is the appropriate Christian hope.³⁶ The four parts are; (1) vv. 36-38; (2) vv. 39-44; (3) vv. 45-49; (4) vv. 50-57. The first part is an argument by analogy,³⁷ the second an argument that is ontological in nature,³⁸ the third an argument based on anti-types,³⁹ and the last, an argument that is based on doctrinal statements of which there are two.⁴⁰

In exegeting the first section, Conzelmann asserts that Paul makes two very distinct points: "(1) The necessity of death as the condition of life; (2) The discontinuity between the present and the future life."⁴¹ These points derive from a close examination of the analogy Paul employs, and according to Conzelmann, the point of interest in Paul is the coming to life of the seed. This coming to life does not occur as a result of some internal mechanism (entelechy), but is the result of God's creative activity. Conzelmann states, furthermore, that

³⁶Ibid., p. 280.

³⁷Ibid., p. 281.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., p. 283.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 289.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 281.

"We have here an understanding of nature which conceives of nature after the analogy of human life, and sees the events of nature, like the life of man, as a cycle of death and growth."⁴² Conzelmann protests the notion that the talk about a "bare kernel" indicates some concept of soul in Paul as the essence of man. To the contrary, there is no specific doctrine of soul in Paul, and existence for him is always corporeal, related to a body.⁴³ This leads up to the crucial question of continuity: for Paul, according to Conzelmann, the new creation is just that--really new--and Paul does not fix upon anything that will continue into the next life, not even soul.

In the next section we are confronted with an at first confusing set of terms. Here it appears that σάρξ and σῶμα are used as synonyms, then switched to become almost antithetical. The only answer to the impasse is to see that, in fact, Paul does not use σάρξ and σῶμα synonymously. If it may be put so, σάρξ must be understood as "substance," while σῶμα is to be seen as "form" and δόξα as its "state."⁴⁴ Thus, "σάρξ is the substance of the earthly σῶμα," that is, the mode of being which the body assumes while on earth. When life assumes a relationship ἐν πνεύματι, however, it is no longer a σῶμα σαρκιδόν, but a σῶμα πνευματικόν (v. 44). Thus the flesh and the spirit become two different substances, while the body is characterized by one

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., p. 280.

or the other as the mode of existence peculiar to each. Of course, the term σῶμα σαρκικόν is not used in the text; instead, a new dichotomy is introduced, between the σῶμα ψυχικόν and the σῶμα πνευματικόν, the choice of the new term having been controlled apparently by a concern to be in accord with Gen. 2.7. There is not the slightest hint that the choice of the term ψυχικόν is meant to suggest a concept of "soul," according to Conzelmann. This is the ontological argument which Paul employs, and it seeks to specifically answer the question "How?" asked at the outset of the text. Conzelmann asserts that, again, the problem of continuity is brought to the fore by Paul: there can be no continuity.

The third section sets up two types of human existence in order to deepen the significance of the argument advanced above. Now, earthly existence is described as "of the dust," while spiritual existence is "of heaven." The models, or types are the "first man," Adam, and the "second man," the "last Adam." The "last Adam" is the man from heaven. A central problem which Conzelmann discusses in an excursus has to do with the relationship of Paul's "last Adam" to the widely discussed Urmensch, or primal man. We have already alluded to Philo's use of the notion primal man above. Here we can only state Conzelmann's belief that Paul upsets the usual type-copy schema, and sets his own concept of the primal man not at the beginning of creation but at the end of history.⁴⁵ The "last Adam" draws a person through the physical to the

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 285.

spiritual, so to speak, rather than away from it. Paul then moves to the use of a term with its own complex associations, namely the εἰκὼν. It will be worn like a garment: in the future, the εἰκὼν of the man of heaven, just as in the past, the εἰκὼν of the man of dust.⁴⁶ There is no description as to how this will take place, and just as we get to the place where such practical questions begin to emerge, Paul seems to have reached the breaking point of such language. His conclusion is that for flesh and blood, that is earthly existence as such, there is no possibility of inheriting the kingdom of God--it must be radically transformed. Again the question of continuity is given a decisive "No!"

In the final section, Paul gives emphasis to the instantaneousness of the eschatological moment in which resurrection and transformation will be compressed into a single event. Conzelmann notes that this position hardly squares with v. 23-26 of this chapter which depict a more drawn out procedure.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, just as Paul had approached the breaking point for conceptions as to the nature of the future existence in the last section, so here he approaches the limit for temporal conceptions. The trumpet, both as an instrument and as a sound, is the last, i.e., truly eschatological, trumpet; it is characteristic of apocalyptic.⁴⁸ The antitheses, perishable-imperishable, mortal-immortal resemble the antitheses developed earlier. The term to "put on" is a bit more exact than the term used above for "to wear", yet though it might give rise to speculation as to the nature of the identity of the

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 288.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 291.

⁴⁸Ibid.

individual with the garment he will put on, Paul refuses to get entangled in such speculation.⁴⁹ Paul makes use of two scriptural passages as his proof-text: Isa. 25.8, and Hos. 13.14. Curiously, Paul makes a substitution on the Hos. text: whereas the original reads "O death where is thy δίκη (penalty)?," Paul replaces the last term with νῆκος (victory). Thus he squares this passage with the one from Isaiah ("Death is swallowed up in νῆκος"), and provides a common term for his thanksgiving found in verse 57: "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory. . ."

The whole chapter is rounded off by a parenthesis: "let us get on with our work." The resounding hope, expressed in the participle "knowing", does not reveal some inner experience of knowledge (γνῶσις), but a knowing based on the eschatologically fixed facts, facts apprehended in the preaching of the resurrection.⁵⁰ Thus, the argument is finished off: the whole presentation is "not in vain," as indeed would be the outcome if the resurrection were not true (v. 14).

In summary, Conzelmann finds the unity of this chapter in (1) The insistence that life comes through death, (2) the nature of this essentially future life cannot be known in detail, (3) this is because there is a radical discontinuity between the present mode of existence and that of the future, and (4) in spite of this there is a confidence which makes present life liveable.

We are in substantial agreement with Conzelmann's exegesis. The

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 292.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 293.

only point at which we must disagree is his repeated assertion that Paul's primary interest is to focus on the discontinuity between the present and the future life. We believe his stressing of this point is grounded in a concern to hold fast to the Pauline confidence in the future that also freely admits its limits as far as exact knowledge of the future is concerned. We also believe he wants to counter-act speculative theories which take some doctrine of the soul as a starting point for discussing what continuity through and beyond death might mean. Nevertheless, Conzelmann has not done justice, in our view, to the insights of Paul in this passage, insights which are carried precisely in the analogy which invites us to consider some sort of continuity. We shall endeavor here to make plain the extent of this invitation by applying the analysis suggested by the New Rhetoric.⁵¹

Let us first examine the nature of an analogy. An analogy exists when: (1) a statement is made which has the form A is to B as C is to D; (2) the intention is to clarify or buttress the first relationship (called the theme) by use of the second (called the phoros); and (3) the terms of the theme and the terms of the phoros are drawn from different spheres.⁵² Several things result from the use of analogy in an argument. The terms of an analogy begin at once to "interact", to shed light each upon the other, to develop a closeness which has great force.⁵³ This closeness may even result in a fusion of terms which is

⁵¹We depend here on the reader recalling the discussion in Chapter 2.

⁵²Perelman, p. 372.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 378.

what is called metaphor; in this case, one term is said to be the other, rather than just to be like it.⁵⁴ As this interaction is effected, a transfer of value takes place.⁵⁵ Since a value has to do with the importance of a thing for "action," or at least a disposition toward action,⁵⁶ the high regard of one term naturally enhances a regard for a relationship to reality of a thing in question.⁵⁷ This has two further outcomes: (1) it moves the discussion from agreements based on "opinion" (the preferable) to agreements that have the force of "fact;"⁵⁸ (2) it also enhances the heuristic value of analogy in that analogies tend to call whole complexes of ideas and relationships into play which go beyond the exact relationship for which the analogy was intended, making it both a creative and an inventive tool.⁵⁹ An analogy may be judged adequate "when the phoros focuses attention on those features of the theme that are considered of prime importance."⁶⁰

We are not in a position to evaluate Conzelmann's handling of Paul's analogical argument. It is clear that Paul is making use of an analogy even though it is difficult to establish the exact terms of the theme and phoros. All commentators refer to the explicit description of

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 398-400.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 381.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 392.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 261.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 386.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 390.

a similar analogy in John 12.24, 25, attempting thereby to clarify the matter in our text.⁶¹ In that text, the theme and phoros may be stated as follows: this present life is to the resurrection as the seed-grain is to the grown plant. If this is indeed the same analogy as appears in the text in I Corinthians 15, it becomes immediately clear that Conzelmann's statement that the understanding focused on in our text "conceives of nature after the analogy of human life" is exactly backwards! It seems obvious enough in this analogy that the matter in need of clarification and the relationship in need of buttressing is not that a plant grows from a seed, but that man's future entails a transformation as radical as that which the seed undergoes in its growth.

But now we must ask if this is the correct analogy, even with the proper adjustments made in the way Conzelmann puts it. It does not appear so. The first thing that strikes us as we come to Paul's development of his argument in our text is that he focuses on an action rather than on a thing. It is the action of sowing itself rather than that which is sown, that catches our attention. And it does this in a most dramatic and suggestive way: "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies" (v. 36). Here the first terms of the theme and phoros are presented: dying and sowing. It remains now for the second terms in each to be presented. Already, however, the interaction has begun. Because each of these terms has, in itself, a rich complex of meanings, the analogy gets off with a burst of energy, an explosion of possibilities. The mere mention of the possibility of dying as something like sowing seed means a re-valuation of the whole process. Exactly what this re-valuation will entail is yet to be worked out, but it is

important to note that the words are barely out of Paul's mouth (or pen) when they have already begun to work.

Incidentally, it may be significant here to note that what so many scholars bring up as a way of getting into the text, they then miss as an important insight. Supposing the analogy outlined above, that between seed and present body, plant growth and resurrection, was a part of the common store of analogies available not only to Christian writers, but to Jewish and Greek writers as well. Would it not be significant in that case that Paul shifts attention from the object terms which are so explicitly stated for example in the passage from John, to a concentration on action terms? Perelman's analysis of analogies may help us again.⁶² He calls frequently-used analogies "dormant," indicating thereby their apparent lack of force in arguments. They become cliches. All that is necessary to awaken an analogy that has become dormant, however, is to call it up in a new application, or to change its terms. When this is done, the previous associations are maintained and add, in fact, to the strength of the "new," awakened analogy. They enrich it. We cannot, of course, demonstrate that Paul consciously chose to awaken the "old" analogy which the passage from John typifies. But if such an analogy was as prevalent and familiar as most scholars indicate, a shift like the one present in our text could not help but enhance it.

In returning to the text, we find that Paul leads us on to the second terms in the analogy. If one sows, he must have something to

⁶²Perelman, p. 405f.

sow. In v. 37, Paul speaks of the object of the verb as a "bare kernel", setting it over against "the body which is to be." Yet, it is not the object, the seed-grain, on which he fixes our attention. By putting it first, "the-body-which-is-to-be" catches our attention and carries into the next verse. This will be the second term in the theme. Whatever is sown is given a body by God. This body, moreover, is appropriate to that which was sown, i.e., reveals what kind of seed it was: wheat, or something else. It is this body, the full-grown plant, which is given by God that interests Paul. This will be the second term in the phoros. It is often observed by commentators that the primitive concept of how plants grow, apparently accepted by Paul here, is that the plant must first "die." Of course, they go on to say, the plant does not actually "die," it germinates, and grows according to its own internal program. It is undoubtedly the case that Paul accepts this idea. Yet, the striking element in this text is the notion that God gives the seed its "body," i.e., the form of maturity proper to the type of seed it is. It is this element which fills out and gives force to the analogy: in the final analysis, all life is a gift from God, and if death is involved it serves to point to God's sovereignty and grace. The resurrection "body" is another form of life appropriate to the kind of seed the Christian sows. Thus, the theme and phoros have their second terms. The completed analogy may now be put as follows: dying is to the resurrection life, as sowing is to the full-grown plant.

We must make two further observations before proceeding to follow through the analogy. First, Conzelmann is quite correct in his assertion that the "bare kernel" in v. 37 has nothing to do with a

"soul," or some other "essence" in man. It can only point to the poverty of the present life in comparison to that which comes in the resurrection. In this sense, "bare" would mean "naked." This term anticipates the notion of being clothed ("wearing the εἰκόνα," v. 49; "putting on the imperishable," v. 54), a favorite kind of expression in Paul (cf. II Cor. 5.1 ff.).

Secondly, having put the terms of the analogy, we must be careful in how we make use of them. It is clear from the initial interaction between the first terms, sowing-dying, that these are the focus of Paul's efforts. Yet, the second terms in the theme and phoros are immensely attractive and suggestive in themselves, and will tend to draw attention away from the first terms. It is instructive that Paul does not give any more attention to the nature of the full-grown plant as such, though perhaps the possibilities inherent in the notion may be responsible for the confusing digression noted by Conzelmann, on flesh, bodies and glory that follow in vv. 39-41. In any case, he picks up the analogy at precisely the point we would expect if what we have said about the analogy so far is correct.

Now follows a series of four antithetical statements each setting the term "sow" in the fore-ground. The series is powerful, to say the least. It strikes us boldly as did the word "sow" the first time it was used. But now something new has occurred. So complete has the interaction between the first terms of the theme and phoros become, that one of them can replace the other; "sow" now replaces "die" in the relationship of dying to resurrection. "It is sown . . . it is raised. . . ." The net effect of this interaction is that it gives the appearance

of a well-established structure which may in turn be used to spark new arguments, to buttress new analogies. This is precisely what Paul turns to next.

In v. 44, we find both the last anti-thetical statement in the four-fold chain just completed, and the first statement which, in its boldness, might lead us to believe that Paul really is concerned to speak about the form of life after death: "If there is a physical (ψυχικόν) body, there is also a spiritual body." The terms of this latter statement are undoubtedly sparked by the terms of the former. Yet, it would be a mistake to examine the statement on its own merits, as if it were complete in itself, intended to make some kind of ontological statement. If it is true that Paul has no interest in describing the exact nature of the "spiritual body," and he certainly shows no inclination in what follows to give specific details, then we must look for the use of this statement in relation to Paul's analogical argument to this point. We find that use in precisely the next verse; it forms the basis for another analogy!

The new analogy is really parenthetical in nature. Its phoros is as follows: "the physical body is to the first Adam;" and its theme (that which is in need at clarification) which completes it is: "the spiritual body is to the last Adam."⁶³ The relationship between v. 44b and v. 45 is made clear in the connecting word "thus." That we have the theme and phoros in their proper relation is the only conclusion to be drawn from v. 46: the term "spiritual" is the one in need of proper

⁶³The completed analogy would be stated thus: "The spiritual body is to the last Adam, as the physical body is to the first Adam."

understanding, and must serve as the term of focus in the theme. The relationship in the phoros helps us to grasp the relationship in the theme: the physical body is derived from the first Adam, described in v. 47 as a "man of dust," while the spiritual body is foreshadowed in the last Adam, the man "from heaven." Paul himself makes clear his intention to use such an analogy in v. 48 where the terms are set out explicitly, though in a slightly modified form.

Finally, in v. 49, we have the climactic joining of the two analogies giving the precise emphasis that was intended from the start. Here, bearing (wearing) the image of the man of dust is equivalent to sowing the physical body, i.e., dying; bearing (wearing) the image of the man of heaven is equivalent to being raised a spiritual body, i.e., resurrection. (We have already indicated that the "bare Kernel" of v. 36 prepared the way for the symbol of "Wearing," which itself anticipates the further development "putting on" in the next section; we should here note that Conzelmann concurs with Käsemann's study on the appropriateness of so translating φορέσομεν.)⁶⁴ The precise emphasis is again shown in Paul's choice of action-words: dying is like sowing seed, or getting into a garment or carrying a statue (εἰκών). Moreover, dying is something that must be done, not simply endured. It must be done in order for the next step in the process to take place. But, returning to our earlier observations on the primitive conception of the process of plant growth, we must remember that the next step does not come as a matter of course, but out of God's nature as both the sover-

⁶⁴Conzelmann, p. 288.

eign over life and a God of grace.

This analysis helps us further to appreciate Paul's conclusion of this part of the text in the exclamation in v. 50: "I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." Whereas Conzelmann sees this as Paul's expression of frustration in having reached the place where he no longer attempts to describe the basically indescribable,⁶⁵ we must see it as the natural conclusion of Paul's analogical argument to this point. Dying is sowing seed. As God gives to the seed that form which reveals what it is in the fullness of life, so God bestows life on the one who dies in faith. Yet this much is sure, resurrection life does not come about naturally, as if by inheritance. One comes to life only through death. That, moreover, is the answer to the question "How?" asked in v. 35; and if one asks in what kind of presence or body one comes to life, the answer is "in a totally new presence."

So we may correctly summarize Paul's argument to this point as an argument using analogy intended to impress on the reader the necessity of dying as the way to life.

Now we are faced with a further problem, though not a crucial one. In the section beginning with v. 51, we find the statement "We shall not all sleep," i.e., die, "but we shall all be changed." The problem is that our understanding of the emphasis given by Paul to the necessity of death would seem to be mistaken if some person could be changed without first dying. The problem cannot be easily dismissed by

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 289.

the reminder that this statement reflects Paul's expectation of the imminent *παρουσία*, for this would still undercut the notion that death is necessary. The problem partially dissolves when we recall Paul's cry to be delivered from "this body of death", that, in other words, earthly existence is itself in some sense a death-filled situation. But this does not fully resolve the problem, since to be involved in death this way is hardly a matter of choice; it is instead a basic human condition. The only resolution would seem to be a choice to embrace this condition, to submit to it so to speak, to affirm it as a part of one's role in the world. Paul seems to call for precisely this kind of response to death in such statements as "I die daily" (15.31), or in his exhortation to be Christ-minded even to the point of obedience to death (Phil. 2.8), or in the kind of understanding of suffering reflected in Romans 5.3 ff. In this sense, the kind of dying that Paul has pointed to all along in this text must be seen as a response that is larger than a single event at the end of one's life. This final dying is instead that event which reveals not only what, but how a person has been "sowing" all his life through.

In summary, then, we may say that Conzelmann is correct in calling our attention to the fact that Paul is giving emphasis in this text to the necessity of death as the way to life. But we must also hold that he is wrong in asserting that Paul is equally adamant that there is no continuity possible between this present existence and that which awaits the Christian in the resurrection. By using a very rich analogy, whose effects and spin-offs we have briefly glimpsed, Paul invites us to consider a sort of continuity. One does not sow seed-

grain unless one expects something to grow from it. For Paul, what will grow will show what kind of seed was sown. Here there is an uncertainty, an unknown, something that awaits a final revelation. But this uncertainty is not complete, for in dying daily one shows how he is oriented in the world.

PRECIS OF THE TEXT

(What follows is an attempt to put into a colloquial paraphrase what we have found in the text. This precis is not intended to be a technically accurate translation, and will take many liberties with the text. We believe it is an accurate reflection of the text itself, however.)

There is always someone asking, "How can the dead be raised? What is life after death really like?" And there are many more with wild theories about such things. These questions and theories are futile, and foolish as well. The essential reality is this: dying precedes living. Take the world of agriculture. In order for something to grow, its seed must first be sown. What is sown is a bare seed, a naked grain. In one way, this means that it is nothing in comparison to the fruit it will later bring forth. In another, however, this bareness means it is exposed, broken down, made naked so that God may clothe it with its proper body, the fruit that identifies the kind of seed it really is. It is just so with the resurrection we talk about. You must constantly "sow", that is yield up, expose, your mortality, your weakness, your wretchedness, in short, your whole, animate being in order to be raised free of death, with real power, with the glory that God gives,

with a body that is spiritually whole.

You've heard us talk about the first Adam and the last Adam. The first man is earthly man--and we mean precisely made of dust, something many people would like to forget. The second man is from heaven--he shows us what we shall be like, those of us who follow him. Now you will recall the scripture that tells us "the first man became an animate being," and you will recall the church's teaching, the last man will be a life-giving spirit. Here we see which comes first, and we dare not evade this issue: the earthly life, just like the first Adam, comes first, and the spiritual follows it, just as the man of heaven follows the first Adam. This can mean nothing less than that the spiritual is to be found only through this life, which includes the reality of flesh and blood mortality.

If we have understood this, we are ready for the greatest mystery of all: even though we die, we shall all be changed. I expect it will be sudden, climactic, like the trumpet summons to battle or the blast that signals the end of the creation. "The trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised, and we shall be changed!" What a victory is there. Yet, as to how, let's just say the mortal will "put on" immortality and the perishable, will put on the imperishable. These will be like gifts, expensive garments which are not ours by nature, but which God freely bestows. We will be able to taunt death with that ancient song,

"O Death where is thy victory?

O Death where is thy sting?"

but we must never forget that God gives us this victory through the One we call Lord, Jesus Christ; (through whose death, death is conquered).

Thus, understanding the priority established by life, that in order to live we must give ourselves up to death first; and affirming the essential mystery that this life we speak of is a gift from God, you are ready also to understand why we call you to press on in daily living, showing your faith, overflowing in your work: no life or death in the Lord is empty, no little thing thrown away, no moment without this mystery of resurrection fully present.

APPLYING THE HERMENEUTICAL MODELS

Demythologizing

The task of demythologizing is to find the self-understanding disclosed by the text. Bultmann asserts, as we have seen, that the key element in the mythologies of eschatology is the word that we human beings are doomed if we seek to live out of our own resources. The powers which make or break life for us are transcendent. It is in finding them, or rather being found out by them, and yielding to them in trust (faith) that we find life comes freely to us. Our text does reveal such an eschatological understanding. Why, the questions with which the text opens are themselves a great opportunity for Paul to rebut the kind of presumptuous thinking that is so characteristic of common men. "Foolish men": as if you knew enough to evaluate what the church has proclaimed. But the questions are put wrongly. The kind of yielding up to death we are talking about is characteristic of everyday

life, as any farmer will attest. The key verse for this kind of hermeneutic will most likely be found in v. 50: "I tell you this, brethren, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." Of course, this does not mean that ordinary human, let us say "earthly," life is unimportant. Quite the contrary, it is very important. But "flesh and blood" points only to a dimension of present existence which is dead-end in itself. This is the dimension where the self is at the center of everything, where the senses are taken as the sole criterion for life and living, where the normal becomes normative. Flesh and blood does not point, moreover, to a "part" of man, as if Paul were indicating that the "soul" or the "spirit" or some other "invisible" part lives on, is the only part that really counts. Flesh and blood indicate rather a style of life, a style that may seem quite broad and diversified, but, like a Persian rug, is as flat as the floor. This kind of life is never authentic, because it never really risks itself in a confrontation with the beyond, with the demand to give itself, with the new, with death. Indeed, all these are anathema to flesh and blood, which seeks instead to feed itself, protect itself, entertain itself, and promote its own survival.

"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." It is an interesting statement, and very complex. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom not least because the kingdom does not belong to it by nature. There is no possibility of simply passing the kingdom along as one passes earthly possessions. The kingdom is not possessed, it possesses. The kingdom surely includes human relationships, but they are of a different order than the self-serving that characterizes flesh and

blood. Relationships in the kingdom are not manipulated for personal gain, nor are they given to protect one against the oncoming of change and time. The kingdom is itself the coming to be of God's order, an order that always signals change, and that is always, to a degree, threatening. The kingdom represents an order in which mutual love and support urge us on to receive what God has to give, but never to possess it. Furthermore, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom, because it requires an outward orientation, a centering on or submission to it, which is entirely foreign to flesh and blood. Flesh and blood is "of the dust," it looks backward, but the kingdom seeks persons who can get their attention off themselves or the past, and give to it all they have.

Of course, our demythologizing would not be complete if we did not say something about the future element included in this passage. The resurrection must be seen as first and foremost the triumph of God in the face of human (worldly, flesh and blood) self-centeredness. The resurrection of Jesus is the first clue to this eventual and complete triumph. But the resurrection that is promised to the faithful is also a true instance of God's triumph in them, and as such it is not only past or present, but future. Yet, in terms of self-understanding, this futurity must not be understood as a time-and-place affair--"out there." Rather, the resurrection that is promised must be seen as a constant dying and rising again that is experienced as a man lives and gives of himself. This is why the call by Paul at the end for continuing service is placed where it is. The futurity of the resurrection is a real future, but it is personal so far as the individual is concerned; that

is, it is in the future of the person where the resurrection as the power of God for life will be experienced and not "out there" somewhere.

For many, this hermeneutical model will serve to interpret our text meaningfully. Undeniably, it does re-present many of the essential elements in the text. It does not, moreover, seriously undercut the predominant mood of the text, or actually contradict it. Yet, the usefulness of this model may be seriously impaired by precisely that which makes it distinctive, namely its calling of attention to the self. This model is highly ethical in its consequences. It calls us to re-orient ourselves to the world, and to God its creator. In essence, it calls us to get ourselves in line with a fundamental reality, that life comes in giving it up, rather than holding it down. As such, it does not speak a word of comfort, so far as we can see. This will mean that the model will have, for this text at least, relatively little value for the preacher in the funeral chapel, or in the pastoral function. In one sense, the call to yield up could be applied to those who feel they must desperately cling to the memory of one who has died as a way to atone for guilt or out of a sense of loyalty. In this case, the word to yield this loved one to the reality of death could come as a healing word, a word that creates faith as well as exercises it. But it will be healing through confrontation rather than support, to use Howard Clinebell's terms:⁶⁶ a call to welcome reality as the bringer of promise as well as pain.

⁶⁶Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 239-241.

The model here applied to the text in I Corinthians does readily commend itself to the prophetic function or to the educative function as outlined in the Introduction. Clearly, a technological society which "loves things and uses people" needs to hear something about the death that is the outcome of such an attitude. Clearly, contemporary Christians need to be reminded that the Christian call is to "seek first the kingdom of God" and to find in it the proper ordering of all life. Finally, the understanding of death disclosed in this text--and what it shows us about ourselves and our orientation to God and his world--is absolutely central to the whole Christian understanding of faith. Indeed, it must certainly be the case that as we see Christ's free acceptance of death, and come to know that this too is the way we have to go in order to come to life, we come to know more what faith itself is. The Christian understanding of death informs the Christian stance of faith, and not the other way round.

The New Hermeneutic

The New Hermeneutic approaches the text to discover what world comes to stand in it, what "shines" in the text, how our situation is described by it, and to engage us in a dialogue. As we have seen, the text also prompts us to translate, that is to carry forward the tradition, in terms that speak to our own era. We shall attempt to apply this model now to the text at hand.

We may begin by observing how the text we have before us carried out the hermeneutical task itself. In this connection, v. 45 represents a significant development. The whole text represents a thorough his-

toricizing of the eschatological hope, while this particular verse reflects the specific attachment of this hope to the life of a single man. While this "man" is described in terms which were used by the gnostics and hellenistic Jews, it nevertheless derives its particular force in this argument by the revision of its usual connotations. The last Adam exerts his influence precisely through, and not above or beyond history. This observation properly serves the preacher rather than the parishioner, but its force is not to be overlooked. The preacher, too, is called to undertake the task of re-vitalizing the understandings of the past in ways that appropriately allow the Christian hope to stand, rather than passing along pious formulas. Preaching on death is an opportunity for more than a rehearsal of slogans, no matter how comforting or how venerable.

But the present text yields far more than this. It shows us what kind of a world it is in which we live, and it shows us how we are to respond to it. The key passage is found in v. 36: "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies."

The world we live in is characterized by death. It is not just that we die, but that we must die; there is no escape. But far from being a word that condemns outright, that renders all our hopes, dreams and projects futile, the text tells us that this is precisely the way that brings life. Of course, this word does not inspire confidence just by repeating it. The moment the word is uttered, it becomes a cause for concern to us, because it also shows us where we are in relation to the life it speaks of. The text interprets us, and it does so with the greatest clarity and therefore also causes the utmost uncomfortableness

on our part. We do not hear the word that life is given in death. This is why we cling so desperately to life as we believe we have it, and refuse to discuss death, or discuss it only with an empty despair. This is why we are obsessed with youth, compulsive in our sexuality, and impotent in the face of war and environmental destruction. We clutch at people or things, causes or clubs, religions or relics from the past thinking that in them we have life. But it is not so. "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies." Life is given in death.

This of course, does not mean that we should commit suicide in order to live. It certainly does not mean that a better life awaits us beyond Jordan, or anywhere else for that matter. It does mean that life itself is made up of the giving and taking, the coming and going of life and death in every minute we live. Cowards are not the only ones who die a thousand deaths. We all must practice it every day. And the way we do determines how we shall stand in the face of death, what world will emerge around us then at the very end. That we are men of doubts means more here than that we attempt to live out of our own resources alone. It means also being insubstantial, unfit to and unable to make it in a world where the wind of the spirit blows freely. To be a child of heaven is to be borne by the spirit, as well as born of it; able to make use of its strong currents to soar, instead of wasting one's precious energy in stubborn resistance.

All of this has obvious implications for the prophetic emphasis in preaching. It may, like the model before it, also seem a bit too contentious for use in the pastoral setting. But we suggest that this may only be a surface observation. The triumphant closure that Paul

brings to our whole text in the words "O death where is thy victory, O death where is thy sting?" is possible only because of the achievement in perspective represented in the application of this model. In the first place, Paul himself indicates that the "sting of death is sin". What is sin but the wanting to play God, the resisting of the divine spirit in the world, the clutching after things rather than the yielding in love? But more than this, we hear through the text that death is not the alien we had been led to believe that it was. Paul claims that it is this mortal that must put on immortality. We are inclined to consider only what comes after the verb, and to ease over what comes before it. Yet, it is "this mortal" which Paul drives us to accept: it and nothing else will put on immortality. In a real sense, "this mortal" is not what is alien, but the immortal is. This is precisely what makes it difficult for us to even talk about death and what lies in or beyond it. Paul reminds us of this fact: it is the physical, not the spiritual that comes first. So in whatever measure death is deprived of its status as alien, in that measure can we begin to deal with its reality, and re-orient ourselves in this world of which it is so much a part. This is of the utmost value to the pastoral concern.

How does this insight that death is a part of our world square with Paul's other great characterization of death as the last enemy? Well, we think. Though death is deprived of its status as alien to life, it is not altogether rendered a friend. Death will always be regarded with apprehension, with fear, even with disgust for it comes abruptly, upsetting what is settled, sundering what is deeply related. That death is a part of life is not an awareness that makes it easier to

accept--would the fetus freely give up its warm environment for the traumatic cold of the delivery room, or the child give up his innocence freely for the burdens of adult life? Death is as important and as inexorable a part of growth as these steps, though it is also a foreboding step, and often as traumatic. So death is an enemy. But it is an enemy with whom we live daily and whose defeat, prefigured in the Christ, is assured only in our free submission to its demands in every sphere of our existence. Our text does not disclose a world where grief or even rage at death are forbidden; much less does it counsel a cavalier attitude toward its reality. The text shows rather clearly the route that is to be followed by the man of faith, and it is a hard one. But it is also glorious. For the promise is that what is sown and what dies does indeed come to life. Faith is here also described as that response of the whole person that affirms both life and death, work and surrender, as the only appropriate response to God.

Van Buren's Edges of Language

Van Buren's observations on the play quality of language offer many exciting possibilities for interpreting the text before us. The three chief language symbols present in the text all come from the center of our language platform, straight from the certainties of daily life, yet each offers powerful meanings on the edges of language. The symbols are that of sowing, dressing and the signal for a military advance--the trumpet-blast.

Each of these symbols has its own place and its own world of meanings. All of them have one thing in common, however: they repre-

sent action that disposes the actor and his destiny in significant ways. As the farmer sows, so shall he reap; his economic future depends on the way he sows, and what he sows. What a person wears makes a difference in how he is received, where he is able to go, what he is able to do. The trumpet-blast, of course, summons the hearer to action that is decisive; the soldier's life is forever shaped by his response to the signal to enter the battle. Already we see what possibilities are contained in these symbols, what "play" can be made at the edges where all men must meet and respond to death.

Moffatt translates the word ἐνδύσασθαι in vv. 53, 54 with the word "invest."⁶⁷ Literally, this means to get into one's clothes, or vestments. We have already seen how Paul himself plays on this theme, using also the concept of the "naked" grain. We have seen, too, how this word can point to the fact that that which is "put on" does not properly belong to the one who puts it on. Here, however, we are encouraged to let our imaginations work with the words in other than strictly logical connections. For example, it is quite often the case that the clothes one wears gives the wearer privileges and respect not ordinarily due him. The judge's robes or the priest's vestments are more than practical garments, they are symbols of office. The garments also to some extent determine the kinds of duties the wearer should perform, or the way in which he will conduct himself. The "garments" suggested by our text are lavish, indeed. They are signs of a kind of wealth which cannot be exhausted. Immortality, as a "garment," pre-

⁶⁷James Moffatt, A New Translation of the Bible (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), NT p. 221.

disposes us to respond with abandon in the kinds of activities we may engage ourselves in: we are not limited to what falls away, what gets used up in normal use. Imperishability as a "garment" conveys the same kind of wealth, even opulence, but goes beyond the sense of limitlessness to speak of permanence: what we do not only does not fall away into nothingness, it abides, it lives. Of course, this lavishness is possible precisely because the "garments" we wear, and the things they entitle us to do are not ours but are gifts to us. The gifts prompt us to celebrate, even in the present life which can only rightly be called "mortal" or "perishable." As suits the mood of celebration, Paul calls forth a song of victory. What remains is to see how we will fill out our garments, how we will conduct ourselves or invest ourselves in them. The attitude of "abounding" is possible because the garments we have and will receive from God show our true position in life. Again, death cannot be ignored or taken lightly, but it must not be allowed to dim our perception of who has called us and given us a place in creation with the appropriate apparel too.

We have devoted a considerable amount of reflection on the way in which Paul makes use of the symbol of sowing seed. Here perhaps we should point only to the act itself as suggestive of how one should approach life and death. Again, it is the imaginative element which must be allowed to catch our attention. Sowing involves the casting of seed in a rather non-systematic way. The farmer walks the tilled soil and flings the seed in all directions. Instantly, we are reminded of Jesus' parable of the sowing of seed and how the seed fell on many different types of ground, beyond the specific control of the sower.

Sowing involves a certain randomness, and therefore also a great amount of risk. It is just so with life and death. As faithful people we are called to fling our seed in many directions, to live boldly, to accept the risks of living and of dying. There are no controls given to us either for how we should sow, or what results we may expect. And what sower returns to his barn with a bag half full of seed? We are called to be free with what we have been given and not hold back. Of course, being the orderly people we are, we will begin to pull back from the edge which our language here has been walking. We will want to caution ourselves and others against the improper, 'devil-may-care' use of our resources. But Paul's language carries really more abandon with it, more daring than ordered thought. There may be appropriate places to speak of "decency and order", as he does for example in discussing Church worship. But having made his points many times in favor of the orderliness of the congregational life in Corinth, he now feels free to inspire his readers to action. And the action which he calls his people to in the face of death is not characterized by cold calculation or timid moderation.

Finally, Paul uses the symbol of the trumpet-blast, the call to action. Carlyle Marney writes on this passage:

The last trumpet means radical change. It is the final signal after which the army plunges into a new state of condition of combat. This is the last, the final, the irrevocable, the ecstatic. The last trumpet means Charge! Begin! Move On! No return! This is the sound of the last trumpet--no further instruction, no new signal. The trumpet marks the edge--not the end, but edge. It always means a new beginning, and it is heard

at the edge between change and permanent. We know about the permanent being signaled here. It is Death. . .⁶⁸

The trumpet here does signal the permanent state we know as death, but in a sense our whole lives have been a basic training for this final combat. We may never before have heard the *έσχάτη σάλπιγγι*, but we have heard other trumpet calls. And when Paul says of this trumpet it will mark a turning point, "We shall be changed!", we know that change is a condition of life itself. So death does not strike us with complete surprise. Its trumpet call is not utterly unfamiliar. The Christian Church is by nature a training ground for receiving the new, dealing with change, moving on into the future with all its unknowns and unknowables, in short for death. As Father Kavanagh observes, the Christian Church is a place where dying has been done, and where its lessons can be taught.⁶⁹ Our Scout has searched out the terrain ahead of us, and a whole intelligence cadre has assimilated the crucial information. We trainees are the beneficiaries of what they have found, and we achieve what mastery we can in the application of their insights in our daily regimen. We are advancing along the edge of language attempting to expand our living space in this kind of talk. There is more here than perhaps Paul intended, but surely less than his own language can convey. And if indeed we are pressed to speak of death proper, Paul does not leave us without a clue. What he speaks of in this text is

⁶⁸Carlyle Marney, The Coming Faith (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 111.

⁶⁹Aidan Kavanagh, "Death and Life in Christ," Thesis Theological Cassettes, V:2 (March 1974).

"death, whose proper signal is a whimper or a sigh, a scream or a groan." But he goes immeasurably beyond this. There is a sense of assuredness about this trumpet, a sense that we know what is involved even though we must remind ourselves that death is still a mystery. The trumpet calls us to engagement. So whatever death may be, it will call for us to be fully present and engaged as even life has always done.

Van Buren's hermeneutic provides us a ground for exploring the possibilities of language for their creative and imaginative results. We may observe here that Van Buren's sense of what language does is very well complemented by the insights of the New Rhetoric touched on above. Specifically, his use of language creates a feeling of presence, i.e., of cogency and force, that is of great help in carrying forward what facets of the Christian message a preacher may want to communicate. Especially in the case of the pastoral function in dealing with death, this hermeneutic promises an ability to "speak" that may be lacking in other, more complex or cerebral ways. The use of words in the kind of "play" that Van Buren suggests is not just a pleasant device, or an ornamental use of language. It is very near the heart of what poetry is and does. By the juxtaposition of words not normally associated, or the probing of words for the possibilities they present, or the following out of ideas that have the ring of the familiar about them but in the context of the difficult or the unknown the preacher's resources for dealing with death are immeasurably broadened.

Auerbach's Figural Method

The figural approach to understanding and interpreting the text

looks for the correspondence between two or more historical events, in which the first foreshadows and promises the last, and the last fulfills the first. In the present text, Paul makes use of the figural method in v. 45ff. We believe that this method, in turn, has possibilities for the interpretation of this passage and for preaching on death.

We must recall that the essence of the figural approach is found in the notion that the figura is an actual historical event. Undoubtedly, for Paul's time Adam was a real, historical person whose actions had consequences for all men who were descended from him. This immediately raises the question whether this method can be used fruitfully in an age which generally regards Adam as a mythological character. We may observe here that still a considerable number of people in the Church do not dismiss Adam as mythical, but accept him as a fully historical personage. While we may not agree to such a simplified view, and will certainly seek to educate as many as possible beyond this position, nevertheless, the pastoral calling sometimes means that we must be willing to accept people where they are for the sake of ministering to their needs and assisting the Spirit in their further growth. It will not do then to consider only those methods of interpretation and communication which suit our own preconceived notions as to what is historical and what is acceptable. Having said this, we must also observe that even where many well-informed or well-educated people are concerned, it is still possible to speak of Adam as if he were an actual, historical person without raising undue objections and without impairing communication. It would seem, then, not at all impossible or unfruitful to make use of the figural interpretation while not holding

to a simplistic understanding of what is "historical."

Paul says of Adam in this text that he was our precursor, that as he was of the dust, so we are of the dust. Being men of dust means more than that we are constructed of certain chemicals common to the earth itself. It means also that we share in the same frailty, physical and moral, which characterized Adam. We have born the image of Adam, and like him we are mortal. Paul further describes Adam as the first Adam. We are instantly alert to the possibility that Paul is making an allegory here. Yet it would appear that Paul is not allegorizing. The term "first" is suggested by the contrast he wishes to draw with the "last" Adam, Jesus the Christ. Certainly, the last Adam is no mere allegorical representation. The first Adam must be considered a real human being whose real human actions have had consequences far beyond their own immediate effects. Sin entered the realm of human experience in this one man, and death entered through sin, even though every man's sin is his own and may differ in detail from Adam's (Rom. 5.14). This view of Adam also precludes our seeing him as some kind of merely archetypal symbol who has only psychological effects on us or who represents our own internal attitudes. For Paul, Adam's credentials as the father of human faults and foibles are incontestable. But now Paul's statement that "as he was, so we are" takes on a new meaning. We have an element of choice in the matter of whom we shall most resemble. The choice entails consequences of its own, furthermore. Adam brought sin into being by attempting to "be like God" (Gen. 3.5), by replacing the glory of "immortal God" with images "resembling mortal men" (Rom. 1.23, 25), and by striving to attain an immortality that was not his

(Gen. 3.4). The "promise" which is contained in Adam as an historical figure is the judgment of death (Rom. 5.12); it passes on to all who fulfill what he was, whose actions are like his in their seeking to be God instead of their submitting to serve him.

The choice is between the "first Adam" and the "last Adam", who is also an historical figure. It is here we see most clearly how the eschatological man in Paul differs most radically from the Primal Man concept in, for example, Philo. Though there are basic resemblances, Paul's "last Adam" is an actual historical person whose actions, like those of the Adam before him, have specific consequences for those who follow after him. The Primal Man is the model of the real man, the man of pure thought or pure soul, whatever that might be. He affects earthly men only insofar as they are informed of him, and seek to unite with him. They must rise above the plane of the earthly in order to achieve final consummation with him. It is not so with the "last Adam", Christ. His actions are historical works. Even though Paul may make use of hymns that speak of Christ's pre-existence, and may tell us that Christ's works have not only human, but cosmic meaning, nevertheless these works are precisely those that are earthly, ordinary, and fully human. Interestingly, Christ's work is described as obedience, and even as obedience unto death (Phil. 2.8), which of course is just the opposite of Adam's work. Through Christ comes an entrance into life, an exaltation into glory, a reconciliation with God. "And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, so we shall bear the image of the man of heaven."

The two figures, Adam and Christ, represent two distinctly

different attitudes in the world, two different dispositions which show themselves in the actions an individual performs. Typically, the attitude of the "first Adam" is reflected in actions that are oriented to the past, oriented to self-glorification and to self-preservation. But the past of this man is too trivial, too remote, too weak to engender life in a context of constant change. It is the attitude of the Christ that promises real and effective life in the midst of constant flux and the in-breaking of the new. Christ is himself the presence of the new, the sign of the in-breaking of God's kingdom. It is no wonder that in his work, that is in his giving to life and yielding to death, that we find the only basic approach that is life-giving. But here, while much of what we have said resembles what was said above under the application of demythologizing, the essential matter is to see that the "attitude" of Adam, and the "attitude" of Christ are not simply internal items, not primarily self-understandings. They are stances in relation to life from which each moved out to do his work. And their stances are ours, too, whether we are fully aware of this or not. We follow in either one or the other's footsteps in every action we perform, in every conception we form as to the goal and end of life. And depending on our starting place, from Adam or from Christ, we will wind up our journey where they have each wound up. (We are aware of the possibility of a universalism in Paul in which even Adam's stance is re-oriented in Christ; yet the thrust of Paul's arguments here in Corinthians is less concerned with

this particular facet than with helping the reader see in which direction he is facing.)⁷⁰

This approach yields insights that are helpful in the prophetic preaching on death, but would be less compelling since its basic premise, the historical nature of Adam and Christ, presents many problems. Its application in the area of pastoral concern, however, is in our view, quite fruitful, and for at least two reasons. First, it has the effect of again stressing that death is not an entirely untrodden path. The historical reality is that Christ died, and yet he lives. The promise is that, like him, we too shall live. The explicit development of this thought can go as far as the specific audience demands and can bear. Secondly, it confirms the value of a person's life who has actively sought to orient himself to the world in the manner of Christ. One fulfills in his own life the promise that resides in Christ's own acts. This kind of identification process can lead to an affirmation of one's own life and death, or to the comfort and hope that one who has identified with Christ in his life time will "receive his reward," i.e., come into life in the same way that Christ has.

We are very much aware of the limitations of this kind of hermeneutic. We concede that it tends to confirm traditional ideas and approaches to death. Yet, we would maintain that it is not in itself inconsistent with what we have given expression to in our theological approach to death as a whole. The figural method allows for a kind of

⁷⁰Karl Barth, The Humanity of God (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 61-2.

presentation of the Christian hope which is suitable for certain, rather restricted audiences. But this same method could allow for more meaning to be communicated than would be the case with a simple rehearsal of traditional dogma. The figural method can itself become a "text" for further interpretation of the Christian hope when and where circumstances warrant. On the positive side, the simple juxtaposition of two historical events in the sense we have identified does allow for the creation of a sense of presence which is a powerful element in cogent argumentation. It opens the doors for a form of argumentation that has claim to more than just the preacher's creativity, or what he believes he finds in the text. For many firmly entrenched audiences, even in our so-called modern, secularized society, this kind of "biblical" argument for, or presentation of, the Christian hope is the only kind that carries weight. In considering the "possibilities" for preaching on death, this is certainly one that should not be overlooked.

THE TEXT AND THE THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

We shall make our observations on the correlation of the present text and the theological approach which we described in chapter 4 very brief.

We do not find any significant discrepancies between the theological approach taken by Ladislaus Boros and the text from Paul. While of course Boros is concerned to give an account of death itself, the moment of decision, Paul is arguing for the appropriateness of the Christian concept of resurrection and puts his argument in largely eschatological terms. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Paul's eschatology

has very specific meaning for the present moment and need not be understood as relating only to the "judgment day." Death is a truly future event, but it is also imminent in all events of life. The resurrection of Christ already puts the krisis, the moment for decision before man. It would not be out of character for Paul to see the individual's death as also a moment for decision. Perhaps Paul is less ready to speak of what happens in death, moreover, than is Boros. But this is less a discrepancy in thought than a result of the tasks the two men set before themselves.

Paul does provide a confirmation of Boros' approach. Paul in his own way saw it necessary to take human death seriously, and not just as a departure for speculation concerning the future. In this he confirms Boros' method. Paul describes death as a moment in which "we shall all be changed," as a moment of transition, in other words. In this he confirms Boros' understanding of the moment of death. Finally, Paul describes this transition in terms of triumph and in terms of a relationship to reality that is whole and imperishable. In this he confirms Boros' essential results, though, of course, not the particulars.

Boros, it must be said, goes beyond Paul in many ways. The explicit analysis of human consciousness that is found in Boros, and that forms an essential basis for his theological approach, could not have been conceived by Paul. Paul's anthropology, like his view of agriculture, is conditioned by his culture and world-view. So, for that matter, is Boros'. But the insights achieved by the two men are complementary and aid in the understanding of each other. If Boros is open

to one criticism from our point of view, it is that his system is grounded too much in the philosophical analyses of human acts, and in the doctrinal statements of the (Roman) Church, and not enough informed by specifically scriptural sources. It is our further view, however, that once his approach is brought into proximity with scriptural texts such as the one here under discussion, his work immediately engages the scripture in a fruitful and exciting dialogue.

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This manuscript is written in Letter Gothic 10 (in the case of English), and Courier 10 Greek (in the case of Greek text), both made by IBM.

While it may seem that with such a machine, a human typist is really unnecessary, or at most an accessory, it is in fact the case that the STMC II requires a highly skilled person for its correct operation. Mrs. Betty Coontz was just such a person.

The transcribing of the first draft of this paper took the usual amount of typing time required ~~for~~ a project of this size. The correction and revision phase was completed at a leisurely pace. The actual production of the final draft was completed, however, over a single week-end. The merits of the system speak for themselves.